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# FANTASTIC RECONSTRUCTION:

## POSTCOLONIAL ARTISTS AND THE COLONIAL ARCHIVE

COCO FUSCO

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Middlesex University  
for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 2007

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Curatorial Project. (PowerPoint presentation of the exhibition at the International Centre of Photography)

**Disk 2.** *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey*, (co-produced with Paula Heredia), (DVD, 32 minutes)

**Disk 3.** *a/k/a Ms. George Gilbert*, 2004, (DVD, 31 minutes)

## Works Documented on Disk: Exhibition History

### 1. *Only Skin Deep* exhibition

- International Centre of Photography, New York, 2003
- Seattle Art Museum, 2003
- San Diego Museum of Art and San Museum of Photography, 2004

### 2. *The Couple in the Cage* video

This video has been screened in over 200 venues around the world since 1993 and is regularly used in university courses in the United States on anthropology, ethnic studies and performance art. I am providing here an abbreviated list of some of the more important public screenings.

- New York Film Festival, 1993
- Highways, Los Angeles, 1993
- Women in the Director's Chair Festival, 1994
- Atlanta Film and Video Festival 1994 (award for Best Performance

#### Documentary)

- KCET (Los Angeles Public Television) and WGBH (Boston Public Television), 1994
- University Art Museum, Berkeley, 1996
- Guggenheim Museum, New York, Room with a View Exhibition, 1997
- Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona, 1999
- Kwangju Biennial, Korea, 2000
- Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes, 2005
- W139, Amsterdam, 2005

### 3. *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert* video

- The Project Gallery, New York, solo exhibition, 2004
- Shanghai Biennial, China, 2004
- Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival and National Tour, 2004-2005
- Women in the Director's Chair Festival, Chicago, 2005
- Documentary Fortnight, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2005
- The Whole World is Rotten: Free Radical and the Gold Coast Slave Castles of Paa Joe, Group Exhibition, Jack Shainman Gallery, 2005
- Black Panthers Rank and File, Group Exhibition, Yerba Buena Art Center, San Francisco, 2006



**ABSTRACT**

- **ABSTRACT**

The context paper addresses works submitted that are informed by postcolonial theoretical debates about multiculturalism, racial identification, essentialism, cultural hybridity and mimicry that prevailed in the cultural milieus of New York and London in the 1980s and early 1990s. Race is addressed in all these works as a language and racialisation is treated as a social and psychic process. The practice that is addressed in the context paper is interdisciplinary, involving performance, video and curating, as well as writing that assesses how these works engage the public in a dialogue about race as a signifying practice and about the seductive qualities of racial imagery.

Central to the works submitted is the notion of the archive, and more particularly the colonial archive. The context paper singles out the pertinent conceptualizations of the archive in relation to the postcolonial theories and practices under consideration. Those most relevant to the works submitted are the writings of Edward Said, Michel Foucault and Allan Sekula. The *colonial archive* is understood as actual repositories of official representations of colonised peoples, as well as a structuring principle that demarcates the possible articulations of subaltern selfhood.

The context paper treats the artistic works submitted as attempts to work through postcolonial theories via critically informed lived experiences, which is to say via *praxis*. What is proposed is that performative re-enactment and interaction with audiences offers an important means of exploring how racialised cultural discourses actually operate in and shape understanding of the world. The principal argument for the originality of the works submitted is that the reflexive use of performances foregrounding the constructed nature of racial identity through re-enactment and simulation constitutes an innovative approach to postcolonial praxis.

The context paper also summarizes relevant aspects of the historical context in which the submitted works were produced. During that period, the author was associated with artists and art collectives that were actively engaged in a postcolonial critique of cultural institutions and Eurocentric aesthetics in the United States and Britain. The multicultural activism of that period concentrated on developing ways to combine experimental techniques with a “new cultural politics of difference,” in the words of cultural theorist Cornel West. Multicultural activists were concerned not only with critiquing the stereotyping of racial minorities in mainstream media and art history, but

also with putting forward a notion of race as a social construct and a symbolic practice. The works submitted address the ways that racial tropes from colonial discourse, such as “the primitive,” reasserted themselves in the contemporary discourses of state-sponsored and corporate multiculturalism.

The context statement focuses on three major cultural projects and nine essays that engage with the notion of race as a language. Those cultural projects are: my caged Amerindian performance, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992-1994), featured in the video *The Couple in the Cage* (1993); my video *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert* (2004); and my curatorial project *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self* (2003). The essays address either these works or others by artists who share a concern with racial representation. The context statement outlines the theoretical underpinnings that inform these works. I discuss how these works have been informed by structuralist and post-structuralist theories of language and discursive practice; psychoanalytic theories of racial identification and fantasy and postcolonial models of cultural interpretation. The conclusion incorporates retrospective commentary on the shortcomings in my approach and in my original understanding of audience reception, particularly in relation to credulity and the suspension of disbelief.

**CONTEXT STATEMENT**

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*It is obvious that the archive of a society, a culture or a civilization cannot be described exhaustively; or even, no doubt, the archive of a whole period. On the other hand, it is not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak, since it is that which gives to what we can say – and to itself, the object of our discourse – its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and coexistence, its system of accumulation, historicity and disappearance. The archive cannot be described in its totality; and in its presence it is unavoidable.*

Michel Foucault  
The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language<sup>1</sup>

## • INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, I have worked as an interdisciplinary artist and have been actively engaged in debates about multiculturalism in the United States, particularly in its relation to the postcolonial condition and to manifestations of global culture. Since 1986, I have created several performances; made single-channel videos and video installations; written and recorded experimental works for public radio; curated eleven exhibitions featuring independent film, video, and visual art; published two books of cultural criticism contributed articles to numerous newspapers and magazines; and edited an anthology about Latin American performance art and another anthology on racial representation in American photography.

For the Ph.D. by Published Works, I have selected three cultural projects and nine essays that demonstrate the range of my aesthetic expression on the one hand, and the continuity of my principal theoretical interest in the workings of racial representation in contemporary visual culture on the other. The works in question all explore race as a language and racialisation as a social and psychic process. These cultural projects are informed by postcolonial theoretical debates about multiculturalism, racial identification, essentialism, cultural hybridity and mimicry that prevailed in the cultural milieus of New York and London in the 1980s and early 1990s. My aim as an artist and critic during that period was to create works that put into practice a postcolonial critique of race in public scenarios so as to ascertain what kind of racial consciousness actually existed in “high art and theory” contexts that had presumably “transcended” race. However, it was not until more recently that I had access to the institutional means that permitted me to curate an historical survey exhibition that would culminate the investigations I began nearly twenty years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language*, trans. Alan Sheridan Smith, (New York, Pantheon, 1972), p. 130.

The principal theoretical terms that inform the works submitted are *postcolonialism*, *performance* and *the archive*. In the subsequent sections of this context paper, I will define and explain these terms in depth, and will address the issue of their validity in the American context. It bears noting from the onset, however, that Edward Said's elaboration of a postcolonial critique and his views of the colonial archive have governed my understanding of these terms. In *Orientalism*, Said asserts that the Orient was a Western fantasy that was projected onto the Middle East "as an exercise of cultural strength."<sup>2</sup> He imagines Orientalist knowledge as an archive that shapes perception of colonial realities and peoples:

In a sense Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behaviour of Orientals; they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere; most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics.<sup>3</sup>

Said's critique of scholarly knowledge and of symbolic representation as politically implicated in colonialist practice opened up a range of possibilities for postcolonial considerations of the role of art and culture in processes of social control. I understand my artworks and curatorial efforts to be *postcolonial* projects in that they have been designed and carried out with a revisionist intent, as acts that revive colonial scenarios in order first to revise them and then to reconsider possible parallels with postmodern articulations of cultural difference. My concern with historical archives of racial imagery and with the social and psychic force of the archive as idea and practice is integral to this process of postcolonial revision. Performance theories informed by psychoanalysis posit subjectivity as an effect of identification, a process "whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides."<sup>4</sup> I see my own performances and curatorial projects that engage with colonial archives as ways of staging narratives of identity formation *so as to unravel them*, and view this tactic as form of what Performance

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<sup>2</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*, (New York, Vintage Books, 1979), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

<sup>4</sup> Laplanche, Jean and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (New York, W.W. Norton, 1973), p. 206.

Studies theorist José Muñoz defines as *disidentification*, which is to say as a dramatisation of the act of distancing oneself from repressive social and cultural norms.<sup>5</sup>

The first of the works submitted is a video about my performance with Guillermo Gómez-Peña as caged Amerindians entitled *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West*.<sup>6</sup> This performance, together with its accompanying documentation in video and writing, dealt with the symbolic construction of the primitive racialised “other” derived from the history of the ethnographic display. Gomez-Peña and I conceived of this venture as a Foucauldian attempt to excavate a “subjugated” history of the ethnographic display of indigenous peoples. We sought to disrupt conventional narratives about interculturalism in performance and theatre.<sup>7</sup> In my essay about the performance I argued that those ethnographic displays, in which indigenous peoples were often exhibited against their will and directed to perform in accordance with prevailing ethnic stereotypes, should be understood as involuntary intercultural performances that predate and inform European and American modernists’ engagement with cultural alterity and their discursive construction of the primitive.<sup>8</sup>

One of our principal aims in carrying out this performance was to suggest that the history we were evoking haunted contemporary multiculturalism.<sup>9</sup> A critical component of our artwork was the archive of images and accounts of these displays, which we included as part of our travelling exhibit and its documentation. *The Couple in the Cage*, the video documenting the performance, emphasises how past and present and fact and fiction converge in the cultural fantasy of the primitive, while also suggesting that the seductive power of that fantasy has not been destroyed by its severance from scientific projects. We also used visual and written materials from colonial archives as our principal references to create a simulation of cultural otherness that resembled many historical instances of the ethnographic display while avoiding any direct reference to any actual ethnic group. Therein lay the originality of our approach as performers and public intellectuals at the time that we developed our work. Our strategic decision to work from

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<sup>5</sup> Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Colour and the Performance of Politics*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Fusco, Coco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña. *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West*, performance, (1992–1994), documented in *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey*, video by Coco Fusco and Paula Heredia, (1993), 31 minutes, **(work submitted)**.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault discusses this notion of subjugated histories in “Two Lectures,” *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–77*, (New York, Pantheon, 1980), p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> Fusco, Coco. “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” *The Drama Review*, 38, 1 (T141), (Spring, 1994), pp. 143–167, **(work submitted)**.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

the site of cultural difference and our tactical engagement with an archive of performances of “the primitive” enabled us to bring histories to light and at the same time subvert audience expectations of ethnographic truth through our staging a refusal to assume the role of native informants.<sup>10</sup>

The caged Amerindian performance, the response to it as a live event and the public reaction to my analysis of audience reception have informed my continued interest in the role of fantasy and of images in the construction of cultural memory about race. That interest shaped the two subsequent cultural projects that are also included here. One is my experimental video *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert*, about the role photography played in generating and circulating racial stereotypes during the FBI hunt for and trial of Angela Davis.<sup>11</sup> In that piece, I attempted to highlight the ways that racialised fantasies about Davis and about black radicals in general in the 1960s and 70s interfered with a “scientific” or “objective” use of the photographic image by American law enforcement agencies. While I was inspired by Allan Sekula’s landmark essay on nineteenth-century photographic portraiture, “The Body and the Archive,” I was attempting in the video to demonstrate how racial fantasies had disrupted the seemingly inexorable archival logic of criminal indexing that Sekula so brilliantly described.<sup>12</sup> That Davis’s image attained iconic status in American culture hardly bears noting; however, the conventional cultural activist response has been to seek more faithful or more positive renderings of Davis or to use audiovisual media to amplify and disseminate her voice. The originality of my approach lies in its focus on the ways that the “Angela-effect” entails its own undoing, which is to say how the hypercirculation of her image contributed to misrecognition of her person, rather than to her identification.

The other project I am submitting is tan historical survey of racial representation in American photography that I curated for the International Centre of Photography, entitled *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*.<sup>13</sup> I consider that

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<sup>10</sup> “Native informant” is a term borrowed from anthropology to describe the indigenous subject who provides ethnographic data and translates for the Western anthropologist. In her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Gayatri Spivak elaborates a analysis of the native informant as a European philosophical construct, and also argues that many contemporary postcolonialists and cultural nativists were masquerading as native informants, which she claims makes them complicit with imperialist projects. See *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, (London and New York, Routledge, 1999), *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> Fusco, Coco, *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert*, video, (2004), 31 minutes, (work submitted).

<sup>12</sup> Sekula, Allan. “The Body and the Archive,” in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, Ed. Richard Bolton, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1989), pp. 343–388.

<sup>13</sup> As an invited co-curator of the exhibition, my responsibilities included the developing the exhibition proposal and curatorial strategy; archival research and studio visits; selection of works for the exhibition and texts for the catalogue; collaboration with the



curatorial project to be my most comprehensive effort at presenting a theoretical model for interpreting racialised vision in cultural artefacts. This exhibition offered two ways of thinking about and seeing America's colonial archive. One relates to the archive as actual collections of racial imagery; the other relates to it as a taxonomic logic that wields political force. The works in the exhibition spanned 150 years of history and represented all photographic genres to show that race has been a subject and an issue of interest in the United States since the inception of photography. The images were drawn from public and private collections around the United States to demonstrate that racial taxonomy was integral to the American governmental project of territorial expansion and social control and that racial imagery was extremely important to the development of photography as an entertainment form. At the same time, my curatorial approach proposed that racial representation is structured as a binary system of visual rhetorics that cut across genres and historical time periods, and that the characteristics of those rhetorics are shaped by the convergence of social conventions and formal devices at an image-maker's disposal. I was attempting to create an exhibition that would represent the archival reasoning that makes America's version of race intelligible. The curatorial strategy suggested that "seeing" race embodied by human beings is a form of cultural literacy that is enforced by the myth of photography's truth-telling function. Concomitantly, I maintained that how we identify subjects racially is informed by a shadow archive, Sekula's term for the repertoire of conventions and types through which identities are articulated in photographic images.<sup>14</sup>

Two of the essays included in this application, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance" (1994) and "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors" (2003), address my own cultural projects under review. The other seven extend and amplify the arguments in my artistic works by elucidating how other black and Latino artists in the United States and Britain articulate a postmodern and poststructuralist approach to race through their ironic reversals of stereotypes and manipulation of historical memorabilia and cultural

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designers who developed the publications; and website and exhibition layout. My co-curator Brian Wallis, who is chief curator at the International Center of Photography, attended to administration, fundraising and the project budget. As documentation of this exhibition, I am including an exhibition catalogue among my submitted works. My curatorial argument is laid out in my contribution to that catalogue. See "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, Ed. Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis, (New York, Harry Abrams, Inc., 2003), pp. 3-48. **(work submitted).**

<sup>14</sup> Sekula, "The Body and The Archive," p. 347.

artefacts. I view their respective interactions with a repertoire of racial representations and conventions as engagements with what I understand to be the colonial archive.<sup>15</sup>

I will argue that the cultural projects submitted here constitute an original contribution to postcolonial theories of race and intercultural exchange in their reflexive use of display, performative interactivity and audience engagement.

Their singularity does not reside in the fact that I produce performances and videos as opposed to restricting myself to theoretical inquiry. Given that Performance Studies as a discipline was founded in an attempt to bring anthropology and theatre studies together, it is not unusual that my performances and exhibitions would be considered a postmodern form of anthropological fieldwork.<sup>16</sup> The field of Performance Studies is rife with examples of artists and theorists who create works based on their immersive experiences in non-academic *and* non-Western contexts, from Richard Schechner's studies of the performative dimension of religion in India<sup>17</sup> to Ulay and Abramovic's sojourn with Aborigines in rural Australia.<sup>18</sup> I will argue, however, that my approach to intercultural theorising through public acts is distinguished by three features: the stress on race as spectacle; the use of simulation and re-enactment as tactics; and the emphasis on racial mimicry rather than "authentic" otherness and its expressive equivalent, the autobiographical testimony.<sup>19</sup>

During the 1980s and 1990s, romantic notions of the "primitive" that persisted in the fields of art and history, as well as in independent media, were subjected to scrutiny by artists, critics and cultural activists in the United States and Britain. Also scrutinised were the exclusionary practices of mainstream museums and the institutional sequestering of

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<sup>15</sup> Other significant works of mine address the bilingualism and biculturalism in the United States; the cultural and political situations of the US-Mexico border; and the troubled cultural and political exchanges between native Cubans and Cuban-Americans. I have decided not to include them in this thesis, because the issues that are central to those works are somewhat different. This is not to say that racial representation is insignificant in those contexts, but that my concerns and interests when creating and presenting creative works relating to those areas have not been centred on race.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Schechner's writings are considered foundational texts of the field. Particularly pertinent to the question of the intersection of theatre and anthropology are the essays in *Between Theater and Anthropology*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Schechner, Richard. *The Future of Ritual*, (London, Routledge, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Murphie, Andrew. "Vibrations in the Air: Performance and Interactive Technics," *Performance Paradigm: A Journal of Performance & Contemporary Culture*, (March, 2005). <http://www.performanceparadigm.net/issue1/article-vibrations-air.shtml>, (accessed August, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> My understanding of mimicry is indebted to Homi Bhabha's treatment of the term in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse". Bhabha argues that colonial mimicry, rather than reinforcing colonial power, de-centres it through imperfect repetition. Thus, a supposedly authorised version of otherness can in certain instances represent a form of menace to colonial power structures. See Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, (New York and London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 85-92.

cultural production by non-white artists into folk museums and ethnic minority venues.<sup>20</sup> This critical discourse was originally imagined as part of a political venture that could democratise cultural institutions.<sup>21</sup> The black, Latino and Asian artists and intellectuals with whom I worked at the onset of my career elaborated theoretical arguments against essentialism in order to challenge the ways that cultural institutions presented and interpreted the creative works of ethnic minority artists. I produced my own work with the consciousness of participating in this particular collective cultural moment, described by Cornel West as “the new politics of difference.”<sup>22</sup> West described the cultural sensibility of ethnic “organic intellectuals” in the US.<sup>23</sup> Stuart Hall wrote at the same moment about the shift in Black British cultural politics as the enactment of “New Ethnicities.”<sup>24</sup> These endeavours should be understood as part of a transnational effort to offer new aesthetic propositions and to advance an institutional critique of Eurocentrism *as a postcolonial project*. In the next section of this context paper, I will attempt to draw out some of the key aspects of the historical context out of which my creative and theoretical efforts emerged.

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<sup>20</sup> For statistics on the exclusionary practices of New York museums and galleries in the 1980s, see Howardena Pindell’s “Art (World) & Racism: Testimony, Documentation, Statistics,” *Third Text*, no. 3–4, Spring/Summer 1988, pp.157–190.

<sup>21</sup> Even conservative assessments of postwar art in the United States such as the catalogue for the Whitney Museum’s “American Century” exhibition acknowledge the pivotal role of the Civil Rights Movement, multiculturalism and identity politics in art of the ‘70s, ‘80s and ‘90s: “Cultural diversity has awakened our understanding that the dominant aesthetic discourse has been Western, bourgeois and male.” *The American Century: Art and Culture 1950–2000*, Ed. Lisa Phillips, (New York, The Whitney Museum of American Art and W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), p. 337.

<sup>22</sup> West, Cornel. “The New Cultural Politics of Difference.” In *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*. Ed. Russell Ferguson, et al. (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1990), pp. 19–36.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Hall, Stuart. “New Ethnicities,” *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, Ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, (London, Routledge, 1996), pp. 441–449.

## • THE HISTORICAL CONTEXTS FOR THE WORKS SUBMITTED

In this section of my context statement I will offer some comments on the historical contexts from which the cultural projects I am submitting emerged. The economic and political conditions of public culture in New York in the 1980s and early 1990s facilitated a postcolonial shift in orientation, particularly for those artists (myself included) who were working outside the academy during that time. In New York of the 1980s, there was a vibrant alternative and non-commercial cultural milieu that featured independent media showcases; artist-run non-profit galleries; non-profit cultural magazines and journals; and frequent public programmes within the arts community that together provided a framework and social space for public culture.<sup>25</sup> There were numerous activist initiatives spearheaded by various collectives and individuals, from “Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America,” which was founded in the early 1980s, to Group Material’s AIDs Timeline, which was made at the end of that decade. Many other artists who were not involved in political activism directed at extra-aesthetic issues nonetheless supported artist-run initiatives and galleries, and argued for the collective rights of artists vis á vis galleries and museums.<sup>26</sup> These efforts were supported by several influential cultural bureaucrats working in New York and in Washington, D.C. who were committed to democratising the distribution of arts funding.

Feeling protected during this period by the official support for cultural democratisation, many advocates of multiculturalism shifted their focus in public forums from a “separate development” model of minority arts to a more direct critique of institutional racism in mainstream cultural institutions *and* avant-garde enclaves. For example, artist Howardena Pindell founded the Coalition Against Racism in the Arts to question disparities in funding between black cultural spaces and those that had no apparent racial denomination.<sup>27</sup> Along with several of my peers, I made many attempts

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<sup>25</sup> For a comprehensive listing and assessment of alternative arts organisations active in New York City in the 1980s, see *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985*, Ed. Julie Ault, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> For example, artists established several non-profit spaces in downtown New York during the 1970s and 80s, among them Artists Space, Franklin Furnace and The Collective for Living Cinema. As early as 1970, the Art Workers’ Coalition issued a statement of demands stipulating among other things that artists should serve on museum boards and retain disposition over the destiny of their work, even when those works belong to museums or private collectors. See “Art Workers’ Coalition: Statement of Demands” in *Art in Theory, 1900–1990*, edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford and Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1992), pp. 901–902.

<sup>27</sup> Gould, Claudia and Valerie Smith, Ed., *5000 Years of Artists Space*, (New York, Artists Space, 1998), p. 106.

during this time to combine analyses of Eurocentrism in curatorial policies and in definitions of aesthetic quality with discussions of the limitations resulting from the narrowly defined mission of “minority artists” that reigned in academic circles and among older generations of black artists.<sup>28</sup> My decision to bring a program such as *Young, British and Black*, about Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective, to a (white) avant-garde bastion such as New York’s Collective for Living Cinema should be seen as part of that effort.<sup>29</sup>

I do not mean to suggest that cultural life in New York City was completely segregated; nor was it the case that there were no artists engaged in struggles for racial equality in the art world before the 1980s. For example, the Art Workers’ Coalition Statement of Demands in 1970 suggested that museums should make an effort to address the needs of the poor black and Latino communities rather than catering exclusively to an elite that was understood to be wealthy *and* white.<sup>30</sup> It could be argued, however, that this demand was an exception to willed blindness regarding the segregated nature of the New York art world, a blindness that contributed to complacency about the art world’s exclusionary practices. For example, the former assistant curator of Artists Space Edit deAk commented in an interview about the art community in the 1970s, “You ask me about black protestors? What black protestors? There were no black people in the art world.”<sup>31</sup> This statement is particularly ironic considering that prominent black conceptual artist Adrian Piper was among the first to exhibit at Artists Space in 1974. What changed in the 1980s, however, was a heightening of concern for the politics of racial representation as well as the resistance of mainstream *and* avant-garde cultural institutions to racial integration.

An important precursor to the interventions of my peers in the 1980s was the 1979 protest against the non-profit gallery Artists Space over an exhibition entitled “The Nigger Drawings.” The incident has been characterised as “one of the great battles of the culture wars” and the “first incredible display of cynicism by the art world progressives.”<sup>32</sup> In a 1998 interview with former Artists’ Space director Helen Winer, artist and interviewer

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<sup>28</sup> Fusco, Coco, “Fantasies of Oppositionality – Reflections on Recent Conferences in Boston and New York,” *Screen*, 29: 4, (Autumn, 1988), pp. 80–95.

<sup>29</sup> See also my essay about the work of Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective, entitled “A Black Avant-Garde: Notes on Black Audio Film Collective and Sankofa,” *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*, (New York, The New Press, 1995), pp. 133–144, (work submitted).

<sup>30</sup> “Art Workers’ Coalition: Statement of Demands,” pp. 901–902

<sup>31</sup> Gould, Claudia and Valerie Smith. *5000 Years of Artists Space*, (New York, Artists Space, 1998), p. 41.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Cindy Sherman characterises the incident as “the birth of PC.”<sup>33</sup> The protest is frequently mentioned as a watershed event in histories of the period. In its specific address to the complicity of an avant-garde art space with dominant cultural forces of racism, it is paradigmatic of the changing attitudes regarding race in the New York art world of that time.<sup>34</sup>

The point of contention was an exhibition by a white artist named Donald Newman. Allegedly, he entitled his show “The Nigger Drawings” because he got charcoal on his face while creating the work, not to incite reaction against the use of a racist term. Nevertheless, a protest by black and white artists and critics ensued.<sup>35</sup> Artists Space supporters relied on two arguments for their defence of the artist: they claimed that free speech should prevail and that the protest was not grounded in any real offence to blacks because it was orchestrated by whites.<sup>36</sup> Later, some admitted that they had felt shame about the lack of racial integration in the art world but did not know what to do about it.<sup>37</sup> As Pindell commented afterward, one positive outcome of the protest was that the supposedly liberal sector of the art world had been forced to publicly reconsider its views.<sup>38</sup> Former director Winer noted in 1998 that “we should have been more aware and concerned, even though many of the relatively hidden issues of racism were not as well understood as they are now.”<sup>39</sup>

I read the conflict and critiques of that moment as indications that the publicly supported segregated system of cultural funding and presentation that relegated “ethnic arts” to separate spaces had turned into a “site of antagonism,” to use Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s terminology. The relationship that the avant-garde and ethnic arts had maintained with funding bodies had up to that point been officially represented as one of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>34</sup> The protest was launched with an open letter written by black and white artists and critics such as Howardena Pindell, Lucy Lippard, Faith Ringgold and Ingrid Sischy, and it led to numerous public discussions about the insensitivities of white avant-garde artists in New York City to their tacit collusion with the systematic exclusion and misrepresentation of artists of colour. While no one in the avant-garde community of that period was known for openly embracing racism, some saw the protest against the exhibition’s title as inappropriate or unnecessary. On the other hand, those supporting the protest saw the situation as paradigmatic of widespread institutional racism in the arts. Accounts of the protest appear in Julie Ault’s *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985*, Claudia Gould and Valerie Smith’s *5000 Years of Artists Space* and Judith Wilson’s “In Memory of the News and of Ourselves: The Art of Adrian Piper,” *Third Text*, 16/17, (Autumn/Winter, 1991), among other publications.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 41

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ault, p. 58.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

parity; now, it was recast by cultural activists as a relationship of oppression.<sup>40</sup> The issue of the complicity of a predominantly white avant-garde in practices of exclusion was integral to the postcolonial institutional critique of cultural and educational institutions and practices. Because review panels for public arts funding in the 1980s were composed of “peers,” many artists, including myself, found themselves in direct confrontations with members of that avant-garde, whom we perceived as part of the mainstream cultural establishment.

There was a strong sense at that time among the artists and intellectuals of colour with whom I was associated of being part of a postcolonial cultural moment that was ushering in a new vision of a multicultural society. This more egalitarian view of culture was to be put forth by the postcolonial cultural worker *engagé*. Calling for a new “prophetic criticism” to be created by “new world *bricoleurs*,” Cornel West’s description of this new cultural worker sums up the sensibility of that time quite effectively:

Distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular, and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing. Needless to say, these gestures are not new in the history of criticism or art, yet what makes them novel - this along with the cultural politics they produce – is how and what constitutes difference, the weight and gravity it is given in representation and the way in which highlighting issues like exterminism, empire, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nation, nature, and region at this historical moment acknowledges some discontinuity and disruption from previous forms of cultural critique.<sup>41</sup>

The sense of political urgency that motivated me and my peers during that period can be understood in terms of what political scientist Seyla Benhabib describes as the ways that multiculturalism functions in relation to consensus formation in contemporary Western democracies. She notes that in deliberative democracies, sites of political contestation are not limited to the official public sphere of representative institutions, but also spill over into “social movements, and on the civil, cultural, religious, artistic and political associations of the unofficial public sphere, as well.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, political theorists Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau argue in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* that

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<sup>40</sup> Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. “Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,” *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, (London, Verso, 2001 second edition), p. 153.

<sup>41</sup> West, “The New Cultural Politics of Difference,” p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> Benhabib, Seyla. *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 21.

in order to comprehend the changing character of oppositional politics in the postwar period, one must note how conflicts have proliferated across the social field and how they have manifested themselves in a wide range of identitarian struggles, including ethnic ones. They also note that a key characteristic of these new political antagonisms is the rejection of bureaucratic control of social life.<sup>43</sup> One might consider the postcolonial artistic disidentification from official multiculturalism in this light.

During that period, my sense of the parameters of a critical multicultural project as an artist and curator was twofold. First, I sought to deconstruct the presence *and* absence of racialised otherness in cultural institutions as expressive of colonial discourses. In the American context, this entailed formulating a critique of whiteness and Eurocentrism. I would argue, for example, that my performance as a caged Amerindian with Guillermo Gómez-Peña was an attempt to rethink interculturalism in Performance Studies and to unpack the colonial legacy of the ethnographic display and its role in shaping modernist constructions of the primitive. As I wrote in my essay “The Other History of Intercultural Performance”:

The displays were living expressions of colonial fantasies and helped to forge a special place in the European and Euro-American imagination for non-white peoples and their cultures. Their function, however, went beyond war trophies, beyond providing entertainment for the masses and pseudo-scientific data for early anthropologists. The ethnographic exhibitions of people of colour were among the many sources drawn on by European and American modernists seeking to break with realism by imitating the “primitive.” The connection between West African sculpture and Cubism has been discussed widely by scholars, but it is the construction of ethnic Otherness as essentially performative and located in the body that I here seek to stress.<sup>44</sup>

Second, I sought to create new stories about the experiences of ethnic minorities without resorting to idealisations of ethnic communities as homogenous or triumphant testimonials of empowerment. This involved elaborating upon emergent theories of hybrid cultural identity and subjectivity as the basis for a postcolonial aesthetics. I would note here, for example, my analysis of the ways that Black Audio’s film *Handsworth Songs* undoes mass media attempts to define the cause of race riots with one story:

Countering the desire of the nameless journalist for a riot “story” is the film’s most quoted line, “There are no stories in the riots, only the ghosts of other stories.” In the place of monological explication are delicately interwoven visual

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<sup>43</sup> Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, pp. 149–194.

<sup>44</sup> Fusco, Coco. “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” p. 44. (work submitted)



fragments from the past and present, evoking large histories and myths. Among the images are familiar scenes from previous riots, such as the attack of nearly a dozen policemen on one fleeing, dreadlocked youth from the Brixton uprisings. With the shots of news clips, they remind us that by the time of the 1985 riots, an established and limited visual vocabulary about Blacks in Britain was in place.<sup>45</sup>

These multicultural debates in public culture in the 1980s and early 1990s did not occur in a vacuum. They took place within the context of the rapid expansion of ethnic niche marketing and the mainstream media's responses, the popularity of rap music and the increasing economic success of a new generation of black writers and moviemakers. The accelerated marketing of black and Latino popular culture that began in the 80s problematised Civil Rights-inspired demands for inclusion by implicitly suggesting that market forces offer a solution to marginalisation. From the vantage point of the 1980s, however, the new prominence of black and Latino culture appeared to be a sign of the democratising force of the popular. Critical discussions of multiculturalism considered the significance of the discrepancy between the celebration of ethnic cultural products and the repressive control of racialised populations, whose increasing visibility was equated with a threat to public safety and, in some instances, to national unity. These social tensions contributed to the sense of urgency that propelled the multicultural project in which I participated. In fact, my interest in the use of photography in the Angela Davis case came out of my desire to explore the changing significance of her image and the effects of its proliferation in two distinct historical moments. In the postmodern age, she had become a symbol of black radical chic, whereas in the 60s her image represented a threat to national security.

During the 1980s, art groups that embraced radical aesthetics and politics proliferated; among them were Group Material with its explorations of the concept of democracy; Gran Fury with its tactical media interventions to heighten awareness of AIDS; and the Border Arts Workshop with its multidisciplinary site-specific art projects about the US-Mexico border. My closest associations with arts collectives during the period were with the Black British workshops Black Audio Film Collective and Sankofa Film and Video, which were combining experimental filmmaking that addressed racial representation with active participation in public debates about the status of racial

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<sup>45</sup> Fusco, "A Black Avant-Garde? Notes on Black Audio Film Collective and Sankofa," in *English is Broken Here*, p. 141. (work submitted)

questions in avant-garde theory and practice.<sup>46</sup> I also worked with Third World Newsreel, a progressive multicultural media organisation that had been established in the early 1970s, and I began to work with Border Arts Workshop co-founder Guillermo Gómez-Peña in 1989 on projects that explored the effects of commodification on cultural exchanges between North and South America. It was our exploration of the relationships between corporate and governmentally orchestrated multiculturalism that eventually led Gómez-Peña and I to develop our performance about the ethnographic display as our comment on the Quincentary celebrations. The imperative to showcase racial minorities as such in exhibitions and public programs of the period bespoke the voyeuristic imperatives of both public and corporate multicultural policy. As Angela Davis writes in “Gender, Class and Multiculturalism”:

Multiculturalism has acquired a quality akin to spectacle. The metaphor that has displaced the melting pot is the salad. A salad consisting of many ingredients is colourful and beautiful, and it is to be consumed by someone. Who consumes multiculturalism is the question begging to be asked. This leads us back to the corporate multicultural strategies, wherein the purpose of acknowledging difference is to guarantee that the enterprise functions as efficiently as it would if there were no cultural differences at all.<sup>47</sup>

The frequency and intensity of artistic events dealing with race and representation in the late 1980s and early 1990s created the impression that a seismic shift was occurring in the culture. In 1988 alone, together with my peers from Britain, I participated in such events as the Society for Photographic Education’s “The Other/Voices: Issues in Representation”; the New Museum’s “Ideology of the Margins” symposia; Yvonne Rainer and Berenice Reynaud’s “Sexism, Colonialism, Misrepresentation: A Corrective Film Series”; Celebration of Black Cinema’s conference “Blackframes”; the “Black Film/British Cinema” symposium at London’s Institute for Contemporary Art; and the “Third Scenario: Theory and Politics of Location” conference in Birmingham. In addition, I organised Black Audio and Sankofa’s first American tour in 1988, which included a symposium at the Collective for Living Cinema in downtown Manhattan. The discussions that evolved out of these events found their way into various publications, including *Screen Magazine*, *Framework*, *Afterimage*, anthologies such as *Out There*:

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, *Screen’s* Last “Special Issue” on Race, 29;. 4, (Autumn 1988), and *Framework’s* issue on *The Third Scenario: Theory and Politics of Location*, 36, (1989).

<sup>47</sup> Davis, Angela Y. “Gender, Class and Multiculturalism,” *Mapping Multiculturalism*, Ed. Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 45.

*Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, and the emergent postcolonial art journal *par excellence*, *Third Text*. They reached a culmination, in terms of their public circulation at the “Do the Right Thing” conference on multiculturalism and independent media in 1989 in New York and the New York Dia Center’s “Black Popular Culture” Conference of 1991, organised by Michele Wallace. After this period, discussions continued, but they took place largely within the American academy.

This retreat to the academy was an effect of the decline of public cultural funding in the early 1990s, which is usually attributed to two related factors. One is the end of the Cold War, which had served as a rationale for spending tax monies on living artists to compete with similar spending in the Socialist world; the other is the Culture Wars, which generated and publicised the ideological justification for demonising artists as social deviants and offenders of mainstream cultural values.<sup>48</sup> Not surprisingly, many of those artists targeted were people of colour and/or openly gay. The 1990s ushered in neoliberal policies that championed privatization, and American cultural institutions dealing with contemporary culture increasingly shied away from political and social controversies that could lead to negative publicity and undermine relations with corporate and private donors.<sup>49</sup> These political factors, together with the continuing evidence of the economic viability of certain black and Latino popular cultural forms, functioned as coercive pressure on postcolonial cultural producers to adapt their methods in order to fit into viable niches.

The 1990s was also marked by the proliferation of biennials in so-called “peripheral” cities such as Havana, Istanbul, Kwangju, Johannesburg, and Shanghai, as well as global mega-exhibitions in Europe and America showcasing contemporary art from outside “the West” that could serve as evidence of the universality of modernism and postmodernism.<sup>50</sup> One of the results of this increased visibility was that the international art market began to absorb more work from the periphery, including the oeuvre of a

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<sup>48</sup> Assessments of the Culture Wars can be found in *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America*, Ed. Julie Ault, et al., (New York, New York University Press, 2000) and also in Steven Dubin’s *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Civil Actions*, (London, Routledge, 1992).

<sup>49</sup> Chin-tao Wu’s *Privatizing Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s* (London and New York: Verso, 2002) details how this shift from public to private funding in New York and London has affected curation, acquisitions and public programs in major museums, as well as how it has caused museums to reevaluate their “commitment” to a general public.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, the 1999 touring exhibition organised by the Queens Museum entitled “Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950–1980s,” as well as “No Place (Like Home)” and “How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in the Global Age,” organised by The Walker Art Center in 1997 and 2003 respectively.

handful of contemporary black artists in the United States and Europe. The role of the art market in determining the viability of art by racialised others grew increasingly determinant throughout the 1990s, leading to the present scenario of pervasive ethnic commodification and hypervisibility. The emergence of globalism as a curatorial model for mega-exhibitions in the 1990s shifted the art world's attention to difference from a national and identitarian focus to an international and geographic stress on "the periphery." However, as critics such as Kobena Mercer have argued, this visibility has not had measurable effects on the political status of ethnic minorities.<sup>51</sup> The New Right has brought with it a new racial politics with its effective marshalling of racial tokenism in support of conservative policy on the one hand, and its dismantling of Civil Rights legislation on the other.

This relatively new scenario has undermined the basis for earlier cultural activist efforts at achieving equity through a discourse of minority rights and distributive justice. All too often, however, in our current conservative cultural climate, the postcolonial interest in the nature of racial signification is conflated with strictly political demands for inclusion and perceived as inflammatory and divisive. This is symptomatic of the widespread but nonetheless fallacious assumption that race and racism are one and the same. In the exhibition *Only Skin Deep*, I take that assumption to task, arguing that racial representation is a visual system whose logic is distinguishable from the social practice of racism, even if racialised oppression can be enforced through representational means.

The attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon took place while I was preparing the *Only Skin Deep* exhibition, as did the establishment of the Patriot Act as a strategy of internal defence against terrorism. One of the most alarming aspects of the Patriot Act for intellectuals and artists has been its association of activist endeavour with domestic subversion. The definition of domestic terrorism in Section 802 of the USA Patriot Act includes attempts "to intimidate or coerce a civilian population" and "influence the policy of government by intimidation or coercion."<sup>52</sup> In the climate generated by the Act, the everyday practices of teachers, students, librarians, researchers, web designers,

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<sup>51</sup> Mercer, Kobena, "Ethnicity and Internationality: New British Art and Diaspora-Based Blackness." *The Visual Culture Studies Reader*, Ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, (London, Routledge, 1998, 2002), pp. 190–203.

<sup>52</sup> American Civil Liberties Union, "How the USA Patriot Act redefines "Domestic Terrorism," posted 6 December 2000, <http://www.aclu.org/natsec/emergpowers/14444leg20021206.html>, accessed 10 August, 2006.

computer programmers and other cultural workers can and have been misconstrued by overzealous law enforcers, who may investigate and arrest without prior judicial review.<sup>53</sup>

The Patriot Act, in effect, has resurrected many of the elements of former FBI director J. Edgar Hoover's illegal COINTELPRO programs of the 1950, 60s and 70s.<sup>54</sup> Through COINTELPRO, which was designed to destroy groups such as the Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement and various New Left organisations, the FBI was able to disrupt and discredit scores of activists, artists and intellectuals who were engaged in legitimate political activity.<sup>55</sup> It was in recognition of the parallels between that past political scenario and the present climate that I chose to create my video about the use of photography in the Angela Davis case. I was particularly interested in how Davis was perceived as a threat on multiple fronts, intertwining racial fantasy with misogyny and political paranoia. She was the first black woman to be hired as a philosopher by an American university, a member of the Communist Party during the Cold War and a prison rights activist at the height of a nationwide prison-based movement for reform. She was identified by the FBI as a dangerous liaison between blacks, Chicanos and white student radicals.<sup>56</sup> The prosecutors at her trial characterised her alleged motive for conspiring to kill a judge as irrational passion for a convicted criminal rather than addressing her political stand on prison reform or her philosophical research on theories of force.<sup>57</sup> As a

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<sup>53</sup> American Civil Liberties Union, "Interested Persons Memo: Section-by-Section Analysis of Justice Department Draft Domestic Security Enhancement Act of 2003," also known as 'PATRIOT Act II,' posted 14 February, 2003, <http://www.aclu.org/safefree/general/17203leg20030214.html>, accessed 10 August, 2006.

<sup>54</sup> COINTELPRO is an acronym for Counter Intelligence Program and was in operation from 1956 – 1971.

<sup>55</sup> The FBI's COINTELPRO activities are assessed in several historical studies, including James Kirkpatrick Davis's *Spying on America: The FBI's Counter-Intelligence Program* (New York, Praeger, 1992); Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall's *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret War Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*, (Cambridge, South End Press, 1988); Nelson Blackstock's *COINTELPRO: The FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom*, (New York Pathfinder Press, 1975); and Kenneth O'Reilly's *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960–1972*, (New York, The Free Press, 1989). Key documents detailing FBI activities are compiled in *The COINTELPRO Papers*, Ed. Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall (Cambridge, South End Press, 1990 and 2002).

<sup>56</sup> Former FBI informant Louis Tackwood states in a published interview that he was asked to follow Angela Davis originally because the FBI knew she was involved in bringing blacks, Chicanos and white groups together. See Citizens Research and Investigation Committee and Louis Tackwood, *The Glass House Tapes*, (New York, Avon Publishers, 1973), p. 107.

<sup>57</sup> Numerous accounts of the Angela Davis trial that detail the prosecution's argument have been published since her acquittal in 1972. Among them are Nelda Smith and Ruby White's *From Where I Sat* (New York: Vantage Press, 1973); Bettina Aptheker's *The Morning Breaks: The Trial of Angela Davis*, (New York: International Publishers, 1975), and Reginal Major's *Justice in the Round: The Trial of Angela Davis*, (New York: Third Press, 1973). Davis herself offered a critique of the prosecution's theory in "Angela Davis

multilingual black radical and intellectual who had made her way into the upper echelons of higher education, she represented the limit point of otherness in every sense for that time. In her combination of internationalist political activism, philosophical inquiry and socio-historical interest in the condition of people of colour in the United States and abroad, she was also exemplary as a postcolonial intellectual. By studying the circulation of her image, I was able to excavate an important history of how conservative political cultures have managed, or rather mismanaged, postcolonial agendas and delimited the permissible characteristics of racialised subjects.

To conclude this section, I believe that my artistic and curatorial work was made possible by a combination of the influence of emergent postcolonial discourses together with demographic and socio-political changes that took place in public culture in New York from the 1980s to the present, which I have attempted to outline here. The first decade described in this section was marked by a more vibrant and active public culture that addressed the politics of representation in relation to race and incipient forms of multiculturalism. By the mid-1990s, the effects of the Culture Wars and of the privatisation of culture were palpable in the changing strategies of race management. The new strategies included the rapid depoliticisation of difference in the art world, the use of conservative aesthetic rhetoric to foreclose discussion of racial representation in art, and the shift from identitarian to geographic and cartographic organisational structures for large-scale exhibition of art from outside the so-called mainstream. More recently, the political culture generated by the “War on Terror” has revived older forms of marginalisation and repression of cultures of dissent, and legitimated racial profiling once again. The cultural projects submitted here for the Ph.D. by Published Works should be understood as responses to these changing conditions.

## • POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND PERFORMATIVE METHODS

In this section of my context paper, I will discuss my understanding of postcolonialism as a cultural and political project, and how it relates to performance as a means of exploring how ideas work in the world. Postcolonial and performance theories have been central to the development of my research methods and have informed the stylistic and tactical choices I have made in creating the works submitted with this application. The cultural projects included here should be understood as attempts to inhabit postcolonial theories via critically informed lived experiences, which is to say via *praxis*. This does not mean that I simply seek to *illustrate* theories through live acts; rather, through my enactment and interaction with audiences, I explore how those theories actually operate in and shape understanding of the world. I have chosen to work in performance, video and photography because these art forms blur distinctions between fact and fiction and are thus particularly suited to investigating psychic investments in fantasy.

One could say that my engagement with postcolonial theory is performative, insofar as I investigate ideas by articulating them as occurrences, as actions.<sup>58</sup> However, the thrust of my theoretical engagement is not directed at the concerns of speech act theory. My work is focused on postcolonial thought informed by psychoanalytic theory derived from Freud and Lacan, especially as it relates to concepts of language and fantasy. My endeavours overlap with the concerns of Performance Studies in that I address the formation of the term inter-culturalism historically and politically by looking at the relationships between anthropology and colonialism, and between modernism and its appropriation of “the primitive” from anthropology.<sup>59</sup> In addition, my performances highlight the ways that culturally informed behaviours are expressive of social norms, which is a key element of Performance Studies.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The term *performative* was introduced by speech act theorist J. L. Austin and developed in his book *How to Do Things with Words*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

<sup>59</sup> Notions of interculturalism in Performance Studies have been the focus of the work of the field's founder, Richard Schechner, as well as that of anthropologist Victor Turner. In my work, I have addressed how interculturalism is understood by such figures from theatre and performance as Bertold Brecht, Peter Brook and Eugenio Barba. See my essay “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*, (New York, The New Press, 1995), pp. 37–63 (work submitted).

<sup>60</sup> Two commentators on my artistic work have noted the value of my performative approach to theoretical engagement. Philosopher Eduardo Mendieta describes my work as an effective means of drawing out connections between history and the present in the making of “post-ethnic racial subjects.”

The majority of my work in the past twenty years has addressed the issue of racial representation from a perspective informed by postcolonial and poststructuralist theory as well as by a variant of cultural studies known in the United States as Border Studies.<sup>61</sup> This perspective constitutes a field of study and a set of concerns that are entirely distinct from those emerging from the study of race and ethnicity in the social sciences: most importantly, it is not limited to ethnographic study of minority groups. In my projects, I concentrate on *racial representation*, which is to say the signifying systems that identify and differentiate human beings based on visible traits, as opposed to *ethnicity*, which I understand to be the ways that cultural communities perceive themselves as united by language, religion and custom.

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Mendieta writes, "If it {Fusco's work} is chronotopologically indexicalized, marking the now and here of geopolitical time, it is also a temporal map that guides us through the contradictions, forces and above all, dispositifs, on which the present imperial *pax Americana* is predicated and which conditions the coming future." Mendieta, Eduardo. "The Coloniality of Embodiment: Coco Fusco's Postcolonial Genealogies and Semiotic Agonistics," *Unmaking Race, (Re)making Soul: The Transformative Aesthetics of Postcolonial Women Artists*, Ed. Angela Cotton and Christa Davis Acampora, (Albany, SUNY Press, forthcoming), p. 1 (of manuscript).

Furthermore, art historian Caroline Vercoe argues that the interplay of theoretical and practical engagement in my work offers a unique perspective on the dynamics of the colonial gaze and of racial fantasy. In her essay on my performances, she suggests that my tactics compensate for the lack of empirical treatment of the condition of the subaltern in postcolonial theories by writers such as Homi Bhabha, which have been criticised as essentialist. She writes: "It is within the body of Fusco's work, however, that the ambivalent, anomalous, and threatening Other materializes. She embodies what Bhabha calls 'the hidden threat of the partial gaze,' for while she appears to be the object of pure scopophilic gratification, the gaze is returned. The complexity of reception that ensues encompasses an ambivalence that even Bhabha may wonder at, for it is the intersection of the viewer and the performer's gaze, which is highlighted and explored. In the same way that Bhabha's colonial discourse relies on the encounter of a conflicted ambivalence between colonizer and colonised, Fusco's performances pivot on the present of the ambivalent gaze. In an ironic reversal of Bhabha's partial Other, who can almost but not quite emulate the Master's culture, Fusco's performances present the Other who can almost but not quite convince its audiences of its legitimacy as Other." Vercoe, Caroline. "Agency and Ambivalence: A Reading of Works by Coco Fusco," *The Bodies that Were Not Ours and Other Writings*, (London, Routledge and InIVA, 2001), pp. 235–236.

<sup>61</sup> I was first exposed to poststructuralist theories through my undergraduate studies in the Semiotics Program at Brown University. In the early 1980s, I undertook graduate study in the Modern Thought and Literature Program at Stanford University, which, together with the History of Consciousness Program at U.C., Santa Cruz, were the first doctoral programs Cultural Studies in the American academy. I was greatly influenced by scholars with whom I studied at those institutions, especially Mary Anne Doane, Ian Watt and Mary Pratt. I also benefited from attending lectures by Umberto Eco, Jacques Derrida and Fredric Jameson at the Summer Institute for Semiotics in 1984. From the mid-80s to the early 90s, I participated actively in public cultural events and emerging publications in the United States and Britain that were focused on creating postcolonial culture in both locales and on critiquing bureaucratic multiculturalism. These events regularly featured interventions by Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Kobena Mercer, Homi Bhabha, Cornel West, Michele Wallace and bell hooks.



In invoking the term *postcolonial theory*, I am specifically referring to the critical analysis of colonial relationships and their symbolic and political residue in a transnational context. As I have already mentioned, I am particularly indebted to Edward Said's seminal research in this area, particularly to his attention to the role of culture and scholarship in the reproduction of colonial relations of power. In the interest of precision regarding the intent and purview of postcolonial projects, literary critic Elleke Boehmer's definitions are particularly useful: she distinguishes between "postcolonial" as "a condition in which colonised peoples seek to take their place forcibly or otherwise as historical subjects" and the hyphenated "post-colonial" as "another period term designating the post-Second World War era."<sup>62</sup> To explore questions of race in postcolonial terms, then, is to recognise that race is not a purely descriptive word, but rather a "colonial code for the relations of domination and subordination between the colonizer and the colonised."<sup>63</sup> Postcolonial analyses of history and its residue can be expressed through art and literature as well as through scholarship. Indeed Cultural Studies, of which both postcolonial inquiry and Border Studies are a part, pays special attention to the particular ways that aesthetic expressions interpret these social and political issues.

Edward Said, author of what is widely considered the founding text of postcolonial theory, *Orientalism*, played a pivotal role in the development of my thinking about postcolonial cultural practices.<sup>64</sup> It was through Said's work that I first developed a sense of racial discourse as an evolving rhetorical system with positive and negative valences. His theories laid the groundwork for an analysis of racial representation in Eurocentric cultural texts as "willed human work."<sup>65</sup> Said also singled out the archive as the principal trope for understanding how Orientalism operates, a move that inspired many postcolonial artists including myself, to engage with the archive both as a colonial repository and an idea. His classic study offered interpretive models for reading race as a signifying system and for understanding cultural history as a landscape of politically potent metaphors, such as those that he defined as integral to Orientalist discourse.<sup>66</sup> Finally, Said's attention to the role of cultural representation in colonialism, by

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<sup>62</sup> Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Brah, Avtar. "Difference, Diversity and Differentiation: Processes of Racialisation and Gender," *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, Ed. Les Back and John Solomos. (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 432.

<sup>64</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*, (New York, Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

highlighting the political character of representation itself, was vital for the redefinition of the strategies and tactics of socially engaged art practice.

My analysis of the Orientalist text therefore places emphasis on the evidence, which is by no means invisible, for such representations *as representations*, not as “natural” depictions of the Orient. This evidence is found just as prominently in the so-called truthful text (histories, philological analyses, political treatises) as in the avowedly artistic (i.e. openly imaginative) text. The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original. The exteriority of the presentation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and *faute de mieux*, for the poor Orient.<sup>67</sup>

Said’s critical analysis of *representation* as a form of social engagement legitimated the shift in focus of postcolonial cultural production that took place in Britain and the United States in the 1980s and its concomitant reformulation of cultural identity.<sup>68</sup> Rather than concentrating on generating “authentic” minoritarian cultural expressions, postcolonial artists and critics of my generation formulated analyses of how existing representations had structured perceptions and representations of who and what we were. These endeavours, I would argue, are part of what can be understood as the implementation of “critical multiculturalism.”<sup>69</sup>

What would become much clearer over time was that Said’s own thesis in *Orientalism* regarding the specific relationships between material and symbolic practices left many crucial questions unanswered. According to Bart Moore-Gilbert, the thrust of the criticism of *Orientalism* has been directed at Said’s theory of colonial discourse as a closed system, in which no workable distinction was made between different kinds of colonial textuality, literary or otherwise.<sup>70</sup> To this critique I would add that Said’s view of Orientalism as a fantasy that supports colonialist imperatives can lead to a somewhat mechanistic understanding of the psychic investment in colonial fantasies that persists outside and beyond a colonial moment. As the backlash against multiculturalism gained force in the early 1990s, this criticism would be levelled more generally at postcolonial

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>68</sup> Stuart Hall describes this shift quite succinctly in his essay, “Old and New Ethnicities, Old and New Identities,” *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, Ed. Les Back and John Solomos, (London, Routledge, 2000), pp.144–153.

<sup>69</sup> The Chicago Cultural Studies Group, “Critical Multiculturalism,” *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, Ed. David Theo Goldberg, (Cambridge, Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1994), pp. 114–139.

<sup>70</sup> Moore-Gilbert, Bart. *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*, (London, Verso, 1997), pp. 49–57.

treatments of Western art as a reduction of all Western aesthetic practices to instrumentalist propaganda supporting white elites. My own work has been centred on how to deconstruct essentialist and reductively ethnographic views of race and postcolonial art practice. However, I have also reconsidered my earlier views of European and American avant-garde appropriations of non-Western aesthetics in order to acknowledge relative conditions of agency and power - and perhaps more importantly, to understand how fantasies offer scenarios and occasions for reception that can complicate and even undo their ostensible purpose.

Postcolonial cultural theories since Said have emphasised the bifurcated “double vision” of the colonised; social and aesthetic hybridisation processes in postcolonial contexts; and the relevance of excavating the subjugated histories of formerly colonised groups.<sup>71</sup> Homi Bhabha’s study of the intersection between psychic and social processes expands upon Said’s treatment of Freudian terms such as latent and manifest (which Said ascribes to forms of Orientalism) to consider how ambivalence has unsettling effects on colonial relations of power and control.<sup>72</sup> Philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah associates the postcolonial with “a space-clearing gesture,” a desire to transcend coloniality, a post-nativist politics and a transnational sense of solidarity.<sup>73</sup> Appiah also underscores postcolonial writers’ humanist concern for human suffering, particularly the victims of the postcolonial state, an ethical imperative that he claims distinguishes the postcolonial from Western postmodernism.<sup>74</sup>

The postcolonial theorists who have been most important for the development of my work in addition to Edward Said are Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall. Indeed, Stuart Hall’s participation as a mentor and an advisor to several postcolonial cultural organisations in the 1980s and 1990s made him a role model for cultural producers of my generation who were seeking ways of remaking identity by combining theory, art-making and political activism. Homi Bhabha’s revisionist interpretation of Frantz Fanon’s theories about the psychic impact of colonialism and racism has been central to the development of my work on racial fantasy, and I will discuss this at length further on in

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<sup>71</sup> “Singh, Amritjit and Peter Schmidt. “ On the Borders Between US Studies and Postcolonial Theory,” in *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity and Literature*, (Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 2000), pp. 3–39.

<sup>72</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *The Location of Culture*, (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 85–92.

<sup>73</sup> Appiah, Kwame Anthony. “The Postcolonial and The Postmodern,” *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, Ed. Bill Ashcroft, et al. (London, Routledge, 1995), pp. 119–124.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

this essay.<sup>75</sup> In addition, several important contributors to American Border Studies have been particularly influential on my thinking.

For example, Henry Louis Gates's historical and semiotic analysis of the black linguistic act of *signifyin'* enabled me to understand the artist David Hammon's visual punning as a form of social critique, heightening my awareness of how race and class are enacted through language.<sup>76</sup> Hortense Spillers's attempt to revise psychoanalytic concepts to account for social histories of diasporic blacks and resulting differences in family formation encouraged me to distinguish between the conditions that inform racial and gender differentiation respectively. This led me to consider in my essay "The Bodies That Were Not Ours" how the history of slavery literally and figuratively marked black flesh and established parameters of visual articulation of collective cultural identity.<sup>77</sup> Toni Morrison's treatment of the representation of blackness in American literature by white authors parallels Said's analysis of the Orient as a Western construct in its focus on the ways that rhetoric and imagery carry social implications and can be understood as political acts.<sup>78</sup> Her uncoupling of the issue of racial representation from a limited concern with the expressions of black subjects may in the present seem somewhat commonplace, but when her critique was first launched it spearheaded a move to transform black studies in the United States so as to align it with the trans-national and interracial parameters of postcolonial studies. Morrison's emphasis on the centrality of race to the idea of Americanness influenced my curatorial strategy in the *Only Skin Deep* exhibition, in that I approached the history of racial representation as a question of national selfhood, rather than a minoritarian issue or exclusively ethnic concern.

Much in the same way that the Birmingham school led by Stuart Hall assumed a leadership position in cultural debates about race and representation in Britain in the 1980s, Border Studies became the paradigm for the study of race and ethnicity in the United States in the 1990s.<sup>79</sup> Border Studies begins from the premise that, although

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<sup>75</sup> Bhabha refers to Fanon throughout his early writings. He outlines his views of the distinctive characteristics of Fanon's vision in his essay, "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative," *The Location of Culture*, (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 19–39.

<sup>76</sup> See my essay, "Wreaking Havoc on the Signified: The Art of David Hammons," *The Bodies that Were Not Ours and Other Writings*, (London, Routledge, 2001), pp. 43–48. (work submitted)

<sup>77</sup> Fusco, Coco. "The Bodies that Were Not Ours," *The Bodies that Were Not Ours and Other Writings*, (London, Routledge, 2001), pp. 3–17, (work submitted).

<sup>78</sup> Morrison, Toni, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

<sup>79</sup> Singh and Schmidt, "On the Borders Between U.S. Studies and Postcolonial Theory," pp. 3–69.

postcolonial theories are often associated with analysis of situations in former European colonies in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, the United States *can* be considered the world's first postcolonial and neo-colonial country. Central to this view is the historical fact that the United States, post-independence, incorporated central elements of European colonial systems, such as the colour-line. Border Studies also reads the American expansionist ventures in the Western frontier, the Caribbean and the Pacific and the concomitant treatment of native populations in those locales as imperialist gestures.<sup>80</sup> My curatorial decision in the *Only Skin Deep* exhibition to examine photographic representations of United States territories and protectorates, as well as historical imagery of the U.S.-Mexico border stemmed from my adherence to a Borders Studies perspective on American culture.

Border Studies and postcolonial theory share an understanding of symbolic activity as a political act; a transnational perspective on cultural and racial identity; and a critique of essentialist formulations of race and ethnicity.<sup>81</sup> Border Studies and postcolonial theory are also united by their interest in the counter-hegemonic cultural practices of racialised subjects. In other words, rather than imagining that subaltern communities transcend their condition by resurrecting or concocting "pure" or "authentic" selfhoods, they are informed by a postmodern understanding of how communities and individuals rework racial identities that are imposed upon them. Finally, Border Studies, like Critical Race Theory<sup>82</sup> with its deconstruction of the colour-blind subject of American law, offers a counter-argument to "post-ethnic" theories of American democracy and national identity, much in the same way that Black British theorist Paul Gilroy's arguments posit that racial matters constitute a foundational element of British national identity.<sup>83</sup> This intersection of racial representation with concepts of national identity and perceptions of national selfhood is the central focus of the exhibition *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self* and of my introductory essay in that exhibition's catalogue.<sup>84</sup> In that essay, I argue that racial imagery in American photography can be understood as mythic speech, a phrase used by Roland Barthes to describe a kind of

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 29–35.

<sup>82</sup> Gotanda, Neil. "Our Constitution is Colour-Blind," *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, Ed. Kimberle Crenshaw, et al., (New York, The New Press, 1995), pp. 257–275.

<sup>83</sup> Gilroy, Paul. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, (London, Hutchinson, 1987).

<sup>84</sup> Fusco, Coco, "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, Ed. Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis, (New York, Harry Abrams, Inc., 2003), pp. 13–48, (work submitted).

expression whose meaning relies on a preexistent set of signs or images and the concepts they convey.<sup>85</sup> Following Barthes' notion that intent prevails over the literal meaning of mythical speech, I argue that photographs can convey particular views of race and its intersection with national culture as if these relationships were derived from nature.<sup>86</sup>

By providing examples of how key elements of postcolonial thought have influenced both my choice of subjects and my tactics as an artist, I hope to make clear that my relation to these cultural theories as an artist and curator has been more pragmatic than reflective. By this I mean in that I have treated a set of interrelated ideas as a resource for conceptualising and interpreting cultural interventions. The performative scenario in which I have located my exploration of these ideas has allowed me to expand upon and at times demonstrate the limitations of certain theoretical suppositions. That said, I should note that most of my efforts at critical interpretation of cultural theories have been directed at Eurocentrism and institutional expressions of essentialism relating to race and cultural difference, and not at postcolonial thought.

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<sup>85</sup> Barthes, Roland, "Myth Today," *Mythologies*, Trans. Annette Lavers, (New York, Hill and Wang, 1972), pp. 109–159.

<sup>86</sup> Fusco, "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," pp. 26–32, (work submitted).

## • THE THEORETICAL STATUS OF RACE AS A LANGUAGE

To contend as I do throughout this context statement that race functions as a language is to invoke several of the theoretical paradigms that inform Border Studies and postcolonial studies. All of them assert that language gives form to all human thought processes, making ideas intelligible. The phrase “race is structured like a language” retraces psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s maxim that “the unconscious is structured like a language.”<sup>87</sup> This frequently cited phrase exemplifies Lacan’s union of structuralist anthropology and linguistics with Freudian ideas about psychic life and development. Lacan stresses that the unconscious, while distinct from consciousness and driven by instinctual impulses, is nonetheless made intelligible via symbolic social constructs that determine a subject’s sense of being as well as his/her perception of the world. Those symbolic social constructs are constituted by signifiers, basic units of language that exist prior to the subject and act separately from their signification without the subject being aware of it.<sup>88</sup> As subjects that have entered into the symbolic order, we recognise the social codes that govern conduct and impart meaning. At the same time, we repress the operations of language in order to speak and act as though what we mean to say is exactly what things actually are.

This view of identity formation as a cultural and linguistic process involves a form of misrecognition that marks the subject’s relation to the Lacanian Imaginary: an identification with a self-image. That version of an objectified self is a narcissistic fantasy that only exists in the field of the other. Furthermore, that fantasy image of the self can be filled in by others. Therefore, our desire for and attraction to realistic images can be understood as indicators of their narcissistic appeal. Cultural theorists have focused on the seductive power of verisimilitude in photography, film and performance precisely because the reality-effect of these representations can be used ideologically to condition and control perception, since we project ourselves into these scenes. Postcolonial analysis also emphasises that identity formation in colonial discourse alienates the subject not only from

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<sup>87</sup> Lacan, Jacques. “Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever,” *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970, 1972), pp. 192–93.

<sup>88</sup> Lemaire, Anika. *Jacques Lacan*, (London, Routledge & Keegan Paul Ltd., 1977), p. 38.

Lacan's Real, but also from the structures of meaning and of being that correspond to the colonised's own culture.<sup>89</sup>

It follows from this Lacanian reasoning that the undoing of colonial discourses first entails recognition of their arbitrary status and then an analysis of how those discourses impose themselves as objective accounts about other cultures. The basic concepts of structural linguistics derived from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, relating to the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified and the communally agreed-upon nature of meaning, is key to this project.<sup>90</sup> With this in mind, I have considered in my work how several postcolonial artists have elaborated projects that question the universality and presumed transparency of the meanings attributed to racial imagery, histories and social spaces.<sup>91</sup> In several of my performance works, I have experimented with physically segregating audiences and even excluding certain groups according to their ethnic background or their degree of bilingual ability in order to highlight how social positioning affects and even determines experience and perception.<sup>92</sup>

Through symbolic references to writing, Lacan and Freud associate the unconscious not only with language but also with technologies of inscription. Freud used the figure of the "Mystic Writing Pad" to link memory with technologies of writing and erasure.<sup>93</sup> These associations would be seized upon by Jacques Derrida, who used them to draw out the relationship between language as a system, the act of writing, the mnemonic

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<sup>89</sup> Lacan characterised the Real as the state of nature as experienced by the subject from which he/she is severed by the entrance into language. See Anthony Wilden's essay "Lacan and the Discourse of the Other," in Lacan's *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, Trans. Anthony Wilden, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), pp. 159–311. Fanon discusses psychic alienation as an effect of colonial racialisation in "The Fact of Blackness," *Black Skin, White Masks*, Trans. Charles Lam Markmann, (New York, Grove Press, 1967), pp. 109–140.

<sup>90</sup> De Saussure, Ferdinand. "The Object of Linguistics," *Course in General Linguistics*, reprinted in *The Structuralists from Marx to Levi-Strauss*, Ed. Richard and Fernande DeGeorge, (New York, Anchor Books, 1972), pp. 58–79.

<sup>91</sup> For example, my essay on the work of Daniel J. Martinez examines his use of signage invoking various subject-positions as a tactic for addressing race and class issues both in museums and in gentrified urban areas. In my essay for the *Only Skin Deep* exhibition, I note how artists such as Glenn Ligon and Carrie Mae Weems reframe images of African-Americans to differentiate between their effect on black and white viewers.

<sup>92</sup> Gómez-Peña and I segregated our theatre audiences for our *The New World Border* performance (1992–3) and prescribed different individualized performances for audience members based on their answers to our bicultural literacy questionnaires in *Mexarcane: Ethnic Talent for Export* (1994–5). I classified audience responses according to nationality, ethnicity and gender in my assessment of the caged Amerindian performance. Finally, as part of my 1997 performance in South Africa, *Rights of Passage*, I issued passbooks for audience members identifying them by ethnic affiliation.

<sup>93</sup> Freud, Sigmund. "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad,'" *General Psychological Theory*, (New York, MacMillan Publishing Company, 1963), Chapter 13, pp. 207–212.



function of the psyche and the technological ordering and institutional power of archives.<sup>94</sup> My curatorial approach to race as a form of inscription on both the individual and the social body and my characterisation of “the colonial archive” as a syntactically structured, historically determined repertoire of racial imagery that functions as cultural memory expand upon these theories.<sup>95</sup>

Postcolonial approaches to race and racial identification are also profoundly influenced by Michel Foucault’s theorisation of discursive formation as a set of institutional practices that mark individual and social bodies and constitute situations in which individuals both undergo and exercise power.<sup>96</sup> Although Foucault did not write extensively on race, his dialogical vision of power is particularly useful for understanding racial identification as an intersubjective process.<sup>97</sup> Foucault’s analysis of the work of power on the body takes place at many levels; he draws attention, for example, to the ideological dimension of the physical disciplining of individual bodies.<sup>98</sup> He also explicates how the “human sciences” construct mental and social being by organizing understanding of physical and psychic dimensions of the body through definitions of human behaviour, sexuality and illness.<sup>99</sup> Finally, Foucault explores how social bodies learn to identify themselves through the construction of public and private memory, conveyed in official records and popular expressions. In his discussion of films that revisit World War II, for example, Foucault outlines his understanding of the ways that cultural artefacts that represent social identity and history affect the individual psyche and cultural memory. For Foucault, filmic treatments of this historical trauma constitute a site of struggle between official representations that support extant political regimes, eroticise

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<sup>94</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Trans. Eric Prenowitz, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>95</sup> Fusco, “Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors.” (work submitted)

<sup>96</sup> Foucault, Michel, “Two Lectures,” *Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, (New York, Pantheon, 1980), pp. 78–108.

<sup>97</sup> Anthropologist Ann Stoler has done the most comprehensive study of Foucault’s unexplained exclusion of colonial issues from his *History of Sexuality* and also of his not widely circulated lecture on state racism in her book *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1995). According to Stoler, Foucault locates the origins of European racism not in confrontation with alien races outside the continent but in the identification of internal enemies and discourses of purification that legitimate state violence. He sees modern racism then as a component of discipline that justifies the exercise of technologies of power for the society of normalization.

<sup>98</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Trans. Allan Sheridan, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>99</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Trans. Richard Howard, (New York, Random House, 1965); Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*, Trans. Robert Hurley, (New York, Vintage Books, 1980); and Foucault, Michel. *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Vol. Two*, Trans. Robert Hurley (New York, Vintage Books, 1986).

power and occlude popular memory, and popular traditions of self-representation of marginalised groups.<sup>100</sup> In my own work, I posit race as an analogous site of struggle. This position complements Foucault's assessment of racism as an "expression of an underlying discourse of permanent social war."<sup>101</sup>

Although Foucault's view of cinema's capacity to obfuscate popular memory is somewhat pessimistic, several of his texts propose tactics for undermining institutional power from within and outside scholarly endeavour. In a widely quoted lecture from 1976, Foucault speaks of the importance of genealogical research for struggles to mobilise subjugated populations against scientific discourses that are aimed at controlling them.<sup>102</sup> In "Truth and Power," he highlights the role of "specific intellectuals" as those who engage with real material struggles against the same adversaries as those of the proletariat.<sup>103</sup> Most importantly for my work on racial identity, Foucault suggests that discursive categories set up for the exercise of power over subjects *can also* become sites of resistance. This assertion has been vital for my interpretation of the ways that postcolonial artists, including myself, rework and subvert historical representations of racialised groups.<sup>104</sup> It explains my tactical decision to elaborate critiques of colonial stereotypes via the embodiment and performance of the role of the "primitive" or the hyper-sexed mulatta, to cite two examples. It also explains my interest in how racial stereotypes can be revised within the space of fantasy. Following Foucault's interpretive model, I treat racialisation and racialised perception as irreducible to institutionally or legally imposed categories. I present them as discursive processes that individuals engage with, invest in emotionally and psychically, and take pleasure in manipulating as a play of power, often regardless of social effect. In all three of the cultural projects presented here, *The Couple in the Cage*, *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert* and *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, I address how images function as cultural artefacts, as catalysts of popular memory, and as agents in the construction and even deconstruction of official history.

Postcolonial theories that combine psychoanalytic theories of difference with Foucauldian analyses of power interpret the social activity and psychic dimensions of racial representation in relation to colonialism and its aftereffects. Stuart Hall's treatment of racial representation in British media relies both on Saussure's understanding of

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<sup>100</sup> Foucault, Michel, "Film and Popular Memory," in *Foucault Live, Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, (New York, Semiotexte Press, 1989), pp. 122-131.

<sup>101</sup> Stoler, p. 69.

<sup>102</sup> Foucault, "Two Lectures," pp. 83-84.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* See also, Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*, p. 101.

language and Foucault's theory of how knowledge is produced in and through discourses that are put into practice in various institutional settings.<sup>105</sup> Hall underscores the need for a social constructionist approach to the making of racial meaning, rather than a reflective or intentionalist approach.<sup>106</sup> The social constructionist view takes as its premise that language is a social activity and that meaning is not a result of an unmediated relationship to preexistent entities or to the intent of any speaking subject. Accordingly, Hall argues that race is not a fixed entity or an objective reality that language simply acknowledges. It is collectively understood, which is to say that it has a social life as an idea, but it is also contextually bound.

Recognising the importance of the notion that signifying systems are arbitrary, Hall gives somewhat more weight in his thinking to the ways they are expressive of power relations. By this I mean that he concentrates on the ways that social groups impose meanings on the world by organising things into classificatory systems, such as taxonomies, archives, and other typologies that claim legitimacy as "scientifically derived" or objectively truthful.<sup>107</sup> His approach is not only indebted to Said and Foucault – it is also shaped by Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, to his analysis of the modern state exercise of control through institutions that socialise individuals and produce consent.<sup>108</sup> Hall explicates how views of racial difference that are institutionally enforced as truths function as means of social control regardless of their actual veracity. At the same time, throughout his writings on race, Hall complicates questions of racial identity and racial "truth" by adjudicating between the psychic and the social construction of difference and demonstrating that racial meanings that are deployed for social effect may be contradictory and unofficial. Noting that racial representation is not a simple repetition or reiteration of psychic processes, Hall insists that racial representations, however arbitrary and unscientific, "have a reality, they acquire a social logic in the world."<sup>109</sup> It is with this in mind that I have sought to use performance to explore how that social logic emerges in lived experience.

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<sup>105</sup> Hall, Stuart. "The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media," *The Media Reader*, Ed. Manuel Alvarado and John O. Thompson, (London, BFI Press, 1990), pp. 7–23.

<sup>106</sup> Hall, Stuart. "The Work of Representation," *Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (London, Sage Publications, Ltd., 1997), pp. 13–74.

<sup>107</sup> Hall, Stuart, "The West and the Rest," *Formations of Modernity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, (London, Polity Press, 1992), pp. 278–318. See also, Hall's "The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media," pp. 7–23.

<sup>108</sup> Hall, Stuart. "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, Ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, (London, Routledge, 1996), pp. 411–440.

<sup>109</sup> Hall, Stuart. "Fantasy, Identity, Politics," *Cultural Remix: Theories and Politics of the Popular*, Ed. Erica Carter, et al, (London, Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1995), p. 64.

In his work on racial representation of blacks in the media, Hall underscores the centrality of the body to Foucault's theories as a key site for the enactment of disciplinary discursive regimes.<sup>110</sup> Hall treats the visualisation of race as a discursive regime that exercises power over the bodies of racialized subjects through the production and enforcement of racial "truths" that take the form of stereotypes.<sup>111</sup> Although Hall pays close attention in his work to the repressive social function of racial representation, he does not ignore or downplay the role of the imagination, the unconscious or fantasy; nor does he diminish the relevance of attempts by racialised groups to elaborate counter-hegemonic strategies.<sup>112</sup> He credits feminism's contributions to analyses of subject formation, as well as the work of Frantz Fanon, for having singled out the centrality of psychic life in the construction of racial difference.<sup>113</sup> Hall assesses this complex interplay between the psychic and the social in the following terms:

What I have learned from psychoanalytic perspectives, from feminism particularly...is the importance of thinking the articulation between the unconscious and the political processes without hoping, as it were, ever to square up those two continents as equivalents. The unconscious itself acts as a bar or a cut between those two continents: it becomes the site of a perpetual postponement or deferral of equivalence. It is therefore impossible to understand politics without taking account of both the unconscious and the social, but it is equally impossible to translate either set of processes into the other.<sup>114</sup>

Much of my work addresses precisely this complex interplay between the psychic and the social. For example, in my video *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert*, I explore the ways that the discursive regimes of race that were deployed by the state against Angela Davis were undermined by the hypercirculation of stereotypes in the media and the racial fantasies that were a by-product of that same discursive regime.<sup>115</sup> In other words, the FBI's attempt to "locate" the fugitive Davis by proliferating photographic images of her generated the counter-effect of encouraging misrecognition of other women and the production of false memories of sightings of Davis.

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<sup>110</sup> Hall, "The Work of Representation," p. 51.

<sup>111</sup> Hall, Stuart, "The Spectacle of the 'Other,'" *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Ed. Stuart Hall, (London, Sage Publications Inc., 1997), pp. 223–289.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (Hertfordshire, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), pp. 392–403.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>115</sup> Fusco, Coco. *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert*, video, 2004, 31 minutes, (work submitted).

Hall's view of identity is thus multilayered: he characterises racial identities as ideological discourses that interpellate subjects as social beings, as psychical processes and as temporary positions required for action.<sup>116</sup> Hall's early cultural analysis of racial representation focuses on the political effects of stereotyping in mainstream media. However, as he became more directly involved with a younger generation of postcolonial cultural producers in the 1980s and 1990s, he produced several essays that concentrated on the various means of undermining those stereotypes as expressions of subaltern agency that bespeak a new cultural politics of difference.<sup>117</sup>

All of these aspects of Hall's approach to racial identity formation are addressed in the works I have submitted. For example, Gómez-Peña and I conceived of the performative enactment of studiously faked racial stereotypes in the caged Amerindian performance as an expression of the provisional character of identities on display and as a creative reinterpretation of histories of racialisation. The attention in my essay "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors" to the ways that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century racial imagery helped to constitute a sense of white American identity for middle-class consumers of ethnographic postcards and stereoviews touches upon how popular media function as ideological discourse that situates its subjects politically and socially.<sup>118</sup> The pervasive influence of Hall's ideas in my work also shows in my eschewal of deterministically political readings of racial representation; instead, I frequently suggest that this social activity is not necessarily a mimetic reflection of actual power structures. In my performances, videos, exhibitions and writings, I explore the ways that racial representations articulate a desire for racialised fantasy, evoke a sense of nostalgic longing or bespeak ironic analogies between past and present.

I hope to have made clear in this section of my context statement that when I claim - following postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, whose views are informed by Lacanian thought - that race is structured like a language, I mean that race is a differential signifying structure whose meaning is arbitrary rather than intrinsic. I also mean that to be racially identified is to be subjected to that system of meaning, and that racialisation is a form of objectification. Finally, I am suggesting that race, like the

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<sup>116</sup> Hall, "Fantasy, Identity, Politics," p. 65.

<sup>117</sup> Hall's essays, "The Spectacle of the Other," "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities," "New Ethnicities," "What is the Black in Black Popular Culture," "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation" and "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" were all written during the late '80s and early '90s, at the high-point of multicultural debates in public culture.

<sup>118</sup> Fusco, "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," p. 42. (work submitted)

unconscious, is a locus of repression, parts of which only become intelligible through the formations of the unconscious, which is to say through desire, repetition and symptoms such as fetishes, dreams, etc. This connection between race and the unconscious is particularly relevant to my treatment of racial fantasy and the role of mental and physical images. By stressing the many ways that racial imagery has been and continues to be deployed as entertainment, I emphasise that the desire to see race, and the pleasure offered by racialised vision exceed and indeed subvert any rational or instrumental regime that might impose racial and even post-racial identities.

## • RACIAL FANTASY AND SOCIAL RITUALS OF VIEWING

Throughout my work, I investigate the role of ritualised viewing in the construction of racial identity. My work spans several scenarios of viewing: governmental surveillance and cataloguing of racial groups; scientific observation and assessment of racial types; and various forms of entertainment that offer racial and cultural difference as spectacles in themselves. Central to the persistence of race as a meaningful term is the way that these socially charged visual schemata intersect with fantasy. It is worth recalling here the etymology of the word fantasy: the word comes from the ancient Greek term for “making visible.” Visual representations, particularly realist ones such as photographs, films and live performances, seduce us with the possibility of externalizing fantasies, of appearing to represent rather than construct memory and history. These spaces of cultural engagement, where fantasies and realities collide and merge, are ideal for exploring our ambivalent relationship with race as a visual system and racialisation as a political history of social differentiation.

In the field of psychology, fantasy is distinguished from reality: it is understood as a mental apprehension of an object of perception as opposed to an apprehension of reality. It is also defined as the act of deluding oneself with imaginary perceptions or reminiscences. These definitions do not explain *why* we fantasise or what fantasies symbolise for us. Freudian psychological theory zeroes in on the desire that fantasy expresses, characterising it as an “imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfilment of a wish.”<sup>119</sup> Freud described fantasies as daydreams and other fictions that people create in a waking state. However, in claiming that dreams are also wish-fulfilments that, at times, are repressed through psychic censorship, he implied that there are unconscious fantasies that are associated with unconscious wishes.<sup>120</sup>

Three aspects of fantasy are key for the creators and interpreters of visual culture. First, fantasies are projections of the mind that, like images that artists makes, enable us to imagine ourselves in places and conditions where we are not in actuality. Second, fantasies allow us to observe mediation between “the different psychical systems in vitro – to observe the mechanism of repression, or the return of the repressed in action.”<sup>121</sup> Finally,

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<sup>119</sup> Laplanche, Jean, and J.B. Pontalis. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 314–318.

<sup>120</sup> Freud, Sigmund. “The Psychology of the Dream Process,” *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Trans. A.A. Brill, (New York, Barnes and Noble, 1994). pp. 468–549.

<sup>121</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p. 317.

fantastic investment in fetishes allows for contradictions and logical impossibilities. Burgin notes that the presence of paradox is evidence of the presence of the unconscious in fantasy.<sup>122</sup> With this in mind, I maintain that aesthetic forms that offer experiences akin to fantasy, such as film, photography and performance, are privileged sites for exploring the contradictory social phenomenon of race.

In my own artistic work and in the artworks that I have written about, I treat race as a social practice and a system of representation with psychic effects. By this I mean that racialised vision operates in both the perception of the reality of social beings *and* in the domain of fantasy. The question of fantasy is key to understanding both how racial vision operates in art and why postmodern revision of racial imagery expresses ambivalence and generates pleasure. Implicit here is the view that an instrumentalist perspective that limits engagement with race to racist action forecloses comprehension of our complicated engagement with race in the domain of the fantasmatic. Film theorist Elisabeth Cowie reminds us that psychoanalytic theories of fantasy distinguish between the investment in visualisation and the desire for realisation. In her widely cited essay "Fantasia," she explains that:

[f]antasy involves, is characterised by, not the achievement of desired objects, but the arrangement of, a setting out of, desire: a veritable mise-en-scène of desire. For of course, Lacan says, desire is unsatisfiable, as much as Freud commented that there is something in the nature of sexuality which is resistant to satisfaction. The fantasy depends not on the particular objects, but on their setting out; and the pleasure of fantasy lies in the setting out, not in the having of the objects.<sup>123</sup>

Fantasy is a domain where instinctual drives and unconscious desires circumvent individual and social repression, and where voyeuristic experience of race's visuality is phenomenologically distinct from the active practice of racism in the social world. The voyeuristic pleasure of racial visuality, reinforced through the fetishistic structure of the stereotype, links the work of race and that of fantasy with the function of photographic images. Images and ritualised viewing scenarios as purveyors of racial fantasies underlie the three principle cultural projects under review for this Ph.D. by Published Works. The *Only Skin Deep* exhibition constitutes my attempt to use curating as an opportunity to map

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<sup>122</sup> Burgin, "Photography, Phantasy, Function," *Thinking Photography*, Ed. Victor Burgin, (London: MacMillan Education Ltd., 1982), p. 190.

<sup>123</sup> Cowie, Elisabeth. "Fantasia," in *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 133.



out the visual rhetorics of race in American photography and to show how the photographic medium was used to produce and reinforce racial fantasies. The video *a.k.a Mrs. George Gilbert* looks at how the federal government's case against Angela Davis was constructed through the manipulative use of photographs designed to incriminate her and classify her as a subversive black radical. The ethnographic display of indigenous people satirised in the *Two Undiscovered Amerindians* performance was promoted, expanded upon and eventually supplanted by mass-produced postcards of ethnic types. Those ethnographic displays originally functioned much in the same way that photographs do, literally and figuratively framing and arresting subjects in a time and place outside modernity and history: the site of the primitive. Fatima Tobing-Rony writes of these displays as "ethnographic time machines" that staged evolutionary time.<sup>124</sup>

The photograph can be understood in psychoanalytic terms as a frozen, fetishistic fragment that materialises and actualises fantasy. The apparent indexicality of the photographic image enhances its evidentiary function and its allure as a projection of the Lacanian Imaginary. In his essay "Photography, Phantasy, Function," Victor Burgin notes that photographic representation separates knowledge from belief. When we look at a photograph we know that the reality in it is an illusion, but the so-called beauty or arresting qualities of the image allow us to disavow the fact that a reality other than what is depicted exists.<sup>125</sup> Racial stereotypes, Bhabha reminds us, provide us with comforting falsehoods, saving us from our fears of unpredictable difference by providing us with a fantastic register that fixes race, making it visible, measurable and objectifiable.<sup>126</sup> Whereas the self-evident beauty of the photograph stops us from focusing on its constructedness,<sup>127</sup> it is the seemingly natural condition of race that deflects our attention from its arbitrary status. Social theorist Colette Guillaumin writes cogently about the role of fantasy in the construction of race as a "fact of nature." She argues that it is through fantasy that collective ideological denial of the non-existence of naturally finite groups occurs. The initial fantasising position, Guillaumin explains, postulates that an unbreachable barrier separates human groups, even though reality demonstrates that the

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<sup>124</sup> Tobing-Rony, Fatima. *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 1996). In particular, see chapter 1, "Seeing Anthropology," pp. 21-44.

<sup>125</sup> Burgin, Victor. "Photography, Phantasy, Function," p. 190.

<sup>126</sup> Bhabha, Homi, "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," and "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *The Location of Culture*, (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 66-92.

<sup>127</sup> Burgin, "Photography, Fantasy, Function," p. 191.

barrier does not exist. The denial of the non-existence of the barrier is effected through the refusal to recognise any contradiction regarding its existence.<sup>128</sup>

My approach to race is informed by cultural theorists who have combined Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic definitions of fantasy and identity formation with the postcolonial rereading of the work of Frantz Fanon. The most relevant work for me in this regard is Homi Bhabha's reconceptualisation of the colonial stereotype, his explication of the fetishising of race in colonial discourse as an epidermal schema and of the value of mimicry as a means of undermining colonial paradigms and power relations.<sup>129</sup> Also important is Judith Butler's reading of the ways that fantasy subverts attempts to fix and regulate identity. Given that desire is a manifestation of unconscious urges, its relation to fantasy is neither direct nor self-conscious. Fantasies can represent ambivalence toward what is fantasized. Fantasies can represent the desire for something external, but they can also be an expression of a scopic desire to see something *within the realm of fantasy*. According to Freudian theory, *scopophilia*, or the voyeuristic desire to look, is complemented by narcissistic exhibitionism, or the desire to be seen.<sup>130</sup> Hence, images that visualise racial difference and idealise racialised subjects are attractive because they satisfy the desire to see race and because they make it seem as though the subject in the photograph chooses to be apprehended as such. Furthermore, picturesque representations of racialised subjects conveniently accord a place to the viewer that detaches him/her from implication in the dynamics of colonial domination. As I wrote in the exhibition catalogue for *Only Skin Deep*:

The aestheticizing of nature and of preindustrial societies, and the exaltation of the racial other's beauty has the incredible effect of reversing the power dynamic between the viewer and the viewed in the real world: in the fantasy of the photographic encounter, the viewer is 'overcome' by the beauty of the other.<sup>131</sup>

Racial imagery is often presumed to be referential to some pre-existent social reality, but it is generally understood in postcolonial artistic practice as operating from the domain of the fantasmatic, which Butler defines as a "variable boundary from which the

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<sup>128</sup> Guillaumin, Colette. "Race and Nature: The system of marks: The idea of a natural group and social relationships," *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology*, (London, Routledge, 1995), pp. 133–135.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Trans. James Strachey, (New York, Basic Books, Inc., 1972).

<sup>131</sup> Fusco, "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," p. 21. (work submitted)

real is insistently contested.”<sup>132</sup> Like many other artists of my generation who are influenced by postcolonial and psychoanalytic theories, I am concerned in my work with the lure of racial fantasies and the ways that colonial scenarios resurface in contemporary situations. While I recognise that racialised symbolic practices can yield political effects, I argue in “Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors” for interpretive models that appreciate the distinction between instrumental uses of racist images and other symbolic practices that circulate racial imagery.<sup>133</sup> This is not only because I adhere to the Foucauldian view of racial knowledge as both pleasurable and punitive. It is also because the contemporary context of production and consumption of racial imagery is one in which postcolonial subjects have more agency both as makers and consumers than they did before decolonisation and the Civil Rights movement.

It no longer makes sense, as it once did, to link the mass marketing of racial imagery by the culture industry to the complete disenfranchisement of racialised populations; instead, those images participate in a more complex manufacturing of consent for the status quo as a “post-racist” democracy. Therefore, I have argued for the need to elaborate interpretive models that differentiate between the desire for visualisation and realisation of fantasy in relation to race. On the other hand, the neo-conservative backlash of the past fifteen years against multiculturalist demands for redress of historical underrepresentation and misrepresentation has generated new defence mechanisms, new forms of denial, repression and sublimation. Therefore, whatever political inequities persist are not likely to be treated as structural. These factors contribute to what I understand to be the paradoxical stance toward race that characterises the present cultural moment. The entertainment industry capitalises on attraction to cultural difference and identifiable racial and ethnic types, while high art milieus abound in racial imagery produced by postcolonial superstars. At the same time, neo-liberal public debate in culture and politics champion “post-racial” perspectives as the most anti-racist, democratic and suited to aesthetic appreciation. Therefore, it could be said that while race is everywhere, the language for interpreting what we see does not perceive it. I attempt to suggest throughout my projects that what is needed is a workable notion of racial fantasy that can adjudicate between the psychic and the political, thus facilitating understanding of the persistence of race as a meaningful term with a distinct existence from the actualities of institutional racism, even though those fantasies can be marshalled for political purposes.

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<sup>132</sup> Butler, “The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess,” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 2; 2, Summer, 1990, p. 107.

<sup>133</sup> Fusco, “Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors,” (work submitted).

Wanting to see something in representational form is different from wanting to see the same thing as part of real life. Fantasy derives its force from being both real and unreal, from looking like our world and not being of our world. There are theoretical and political dangers involved in construing the desire for fantasy as a desire for *the realisation of fantasy as reality*, failing to recognise the representational status and desirability of fantasy *as fantasy*. Judith Butler identifies the fallacy of the anti-porn position that conflates the signified of fantasy with the referent, misconstruing depiction as necessarily injurious.<sup>134</sup> A similar argument has been made about instrumentalist readings of racial imagery in the present.<sup>135</sup> At the same time, in order to avoid arguing as if fantasies with historical references have *no* social significance or repercussions simply because they are fantasies, I find it judicious to account for the social force of racial stereotyping that has historically resided in the capacity of dominant groups to enforce such a conflation. Even Butler acknowledges that “it is precisely the moment in which the phantasmatic assumes the status of the real, that is, when the two become compellingly conflated, that the phantasmatic exercises its power most effectively.”<sup>136</sup> In other words, racial stereotypes are culturally constructed fantasies of otherness that wield their force in the world when they are used repressively to presume negative truths about those who are subjected to them.

In an illuminating essay on the figure of the black “mammy” in cinema, Maria St. John describes the psychic investment in this racial stereotype in terms of Jacques Lacan’s theory of “captation.” This argument emphasises the power of the image as fantasy as well as the psychic disavowal of the reality that the fantasy masks. According to St. John, Lacan uses this term “to refer to the imaginary effects of the specular image. It connotes fascination and fixation, and suggests the ways in which people are captivated - held in place - at the level of the imaginary through the assumption of an identity.”<sup>137</sup> St. John then invokes Kaja Silverman’s theorisation of “dominant fiction” to explain how this stereotype functions:

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<sup>134</sup> Butler, “The Force of Fantasy,” pp. 105–106.

<sup>135</sup> See, for example, Kobena Mercer’s “Black Art and the Burden of Representation” and “Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics.” *Welcome to the Jungle: New Position in Black Cultural Studies*, (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 233–286.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>137</sup> St. John, Maria. “Cinematic and Fantasmatic Contours of Mammy: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Race, Fantasy and Cultural Representation,” *fort da*, V:2, (Fall 1999), [http://www.fortda.org/fall\\_99/cinematic.html](http://www.fortda.org/fall_99/cinematic.html), accessed February, 2005.

It seems to me that mammy is a dominant cultural fantasy, re-enacted with each new production of her image. I see this fantasy in terms of what Kaja Silverman (1992) has called "the dominant fiction." Silverman argues that "ideological belief" occurs at the moment when an image which the subject consciously knows to be culturally fabricated nevertheless succeeds in being recognised or acknowledged as a "pure, naked perception of reality"...She suggests that belief, the arbiter of reality, is granted at the level of fantasy, rather than that of consciousness. She asserts further that, within every society, hegemony is key to certain privileged terms, around which there is a kind of doubling up of belief. Since everything that successfully passes for "reality" within a given social formation is articulated in relation to these terms, they represent ideological stress points...I would like to suggest that the social system of race represents such a stress point, and that mammy is erected to soothe the strain. Silverman's focus in this Althusserian analysis is on the ways in which "the subject is sexually, as well as economically, "captated" ... It is my contention that mammy marks one of the sites at which the dominant cultural subject is, in addition, racially captated.<sup>138</sup>

Psychoanalysis can thus be marshalled to explain how the social force of racial stereotyping may be aided and abetted by psychic structures, even in contexts such as our present when legally codified inequality based on race has been eradicated. However, contemporary cultural theorists influenced by post-structuralist ideas have reviewed the question of the psyche's investment in fetishes, fantasies and stereotypes to foreground the presence of contradiction and ambivalence as evidence of the ways that unconscious drives complicate racial identification. In his landmark essay, "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,"<sup>139</sup> Homi Bhabha asserts that racial stereotyping is colonial discourse's crucial means of fixing an otherwise unstable series of bodily signs of difference in order to enforce racial and cultural hierarchisation.<sup>140</sup> In that sense, he interprets racial stereotyping psychoanalytically as a form of fetishism. However, for Bhabha, the hypervisibility of race masks a lack not on the part of the racialised subject, but in the psyche of the coloniser, who defines himself in terms of what he is not.

Therein lies a key difference between psychoanalytic theorisation of race and that of gender. The scopic scenario of gender difference is an expression of the anxiety of castration and sexual difference that is organised around *absence* (of the penis). The

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," *The Location of Culture*, (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 66-84.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

establishment of a fetish masks this threatening difference. The scopic scenario of racial difference, on the other hand, is fixated upon skin as the visible *presence* of difference (i.e. not all people have the same skin, and therefore not all people are the same). Racial stereotyping as a fetishistic process organizes an unstable and therefore threatening range of differences into a safely predictable schema.<sup>141</sup> Hence, the racist aphorism, “all blacks look alike:” stereotypes are supposed to give the impression of the mastery of the beholder by guaranteeing foreknowledge of the racialised subject’s identity and mien. Bhabha sees this process as part of what he deduces from Fanon about the peculiar visibility of colonial power, in which power is produced in fetishised spectacles of “natural/racial pre-eminence.”

Bhabha’s argument, however, rests on the assertion that ambivalence underlies all colonial discourse. He asserts that the task of mastery through stereotyping is never fully complete. That fantasy of mastery that the stereotype portends is laced with anxiety about that failure to achieve total control over otherness.

For the stereotype is at once a substitute and a shadow. By acceding to the wildest fantasies (in the popular sense) of the colonizer, the stereotyped Other reveals something of the ‘fantasy’ (as desire, defence) of that position of mastery....[W]hat is being dramatized is a separation – *between* races, cultures, histories, *within* histories – a separation *before* and *after* that repeat obsessively the mythical moment of disjunction.<sup>142</sup>

The insistence on repeating stereotypes is not a mark of ignorance (as is implied by the common-sense assumption that stereotypes are deployed by those who are unfamiliar with others) but a sign of the (white) subject’s sense of the inevitability of the gesture’s failure.

Postcolonial cultural producers whose work I have drawn on and interpreted have been equally concerned with revising understanding of black subjectivity. Black artist Isaac Julien and cultural theorist Kobena Mercer expanded upon Bhabha’s theorisation of colonial ambivalence to raise the question of the psychic investment of the postcolonial subject in racial stereotypes. In their 1984 essay about Robert Mapplethorpe’s *The Black Book* and images of black gay men in pornography, they offered a reading of racial stereotypes as potential sites of visual pleasure for racialised subjects. In doing so, they

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., pp. 74–75.

<sup>142</sup> Bhabha, “The Other Question,” p. 82.

recognised that for members of an underrepresented group the force of the desire to see an image of oneself can exceed moral proscription against particular forms of representation:

We return to that feeling of ambivalence, because while we can recognise the oppressive dimension of the fantasies staged in such sexual representation, we still want to look, even if we cannot find the images we want to see. What is at issue is that the same signs can be read to produce different meanings...Colonial fantasy attempts to 'fix' the position of the black subject into a space that mirrors the object of white desires, but black readers may appropriate pleasures by reading against the grain, overturning the signs of others into signifiers of identity. In seeing images of other black men coded as gay, there is an affirmation of our sexual identity.<sup>143</sup>

Judith Butler's work on the political controversy surrounding Mapplethorpe's images offers additional avenues for consideration of unexpected turns of fantasy. Fantasy may establish the real through repeated insistent posturing. Butler notes, but it contains the potential for suspending its own ontological claim.<sup>144</sup> Butler reminds us that according to standard psychoanalytic definitions of fantasy, it permits the subject to be both in and out of the scene represented. Therefore, fantasy undermines whatever restrictive function to which it may be put by multiplying identity. Furthermore, by suspending action, it provides an occasion for critical investigation. Butler ends her treatment of Mapplethorpe's work by citing Foucault's assertion that homosexuality as a term may have been instituted to designate a set of behaviours as a pathology, but "the discursive life of that identity exceeds the purposes to which it was put."<sup>145</sup>

What Butler describes as the critical potential of fantasies that explore a so-called "deviant" sexual identity, I would argue, is equally applicable to the postcolonial treatment of racial identity. Postcolonial artistic engagement with the "discursive life of race" involves an encounter not only with the political and social history of the terminology, but also with the parameters of its visibility. Psychoanalysis offers an explanatory framework for the intersubjective dynamics of racialisation; however, it is the concept of the archive, informed by structuralism and poststructuralist theory, that best clarifies the formal and compositional elements of racial imagery.

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<sup>143</sup> Mercer, Kobena and Isaac Julien. "Black Masculinity and the Sexual Politics of Race," *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 133–136.

<sup>144</sup> Butler, "The Force of Fantasy," p. 106.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

## • THE COLONIAL ARCHIVE AND POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE

I use the term colonial archive to refer to culturally specific repertoires of racial imagery that exist as material realities and abstractions. Insofar as I consider racial logic and vision in the United States and Europe to be strategies of social control that arise from colonialism and imperialism, I understand there to be a link between the notion of a *colonial* archive and *racial* imagery. The colonial archive catalogues all recognisable racial types as well as delineating the formal conventions of their presentation. As Said notes in his conceptualisation of Orientalism as an archive, it is “better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than simply as a positive doctrine.”<sup>146</sup> The colonial emerges from historical relations of subjection, and its very status as a “discourse of truth” about the colonised marks it as a means of social control. One could say that as an abstract paradigm, the archive functions as a refracted mirror of the racialised self. It is in this sense that the archive has served many postcolonial artists – it serves as a visual metaphor with which to dramatize the process of racial subjection and critical disengagement from repressive racial norms.

Alienation from an introjected self-image is a recurring theme in black thought. African-American writer W.E.B. Dubois characterised this condition in relation to black people in the United States as “double consciousness”:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.<sup>147</sup>

The decolonising project of attaining self-knowledge involves the elaboration of tactics for critically distancing oneself from fantasmatic scenes of racial subjection. What I explore in my artistic and curatorial work is the shift by artists, including myself, to the

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<sup>146</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 42.

<sup>147</sup> Dubois, W.E.B. “On Double Consciousness,” *The Souls of Black Folk*, <http://www.duboislc.org/html/DoubleConsciousness.html>, accessed 10 June, 2005.



approach to racial formation and the methods used to achieve it. In keeping with Elleke Boehmer's assertion that the postcolonial condition is one in which colonised peoples reposition themselves as historical subjects, I suggest in my work that critical reevaluation of the colonial archive is at the heart of postcolonial visual artists' endeavour to establish their symbolic and political terrain as cultural producers. As I wrote in my essay for the *Only Skin Deep* catalogue:

The postcolonial investigation of the photographic archive by many artists of colour that began in the 1970s and then flourished in the 1980s and 1990s ushered in a watershed period for the development of that informed consent and for the changing of roles regarding the construction and reception of racial imagery. The artists not only underscore the relevance of historical records and of marginalized non-white photographers of earlier generations, but also place a new emphasis on the ways that bodies had been classified within cultural institutions; and on how cultural institutions and the media perpetuated fictions about ethnic identities; and on how audience desires had been defined in racial terms.<sup>148</sup>

Archives have a dual status as a logic of classification that organises official records and the actual locations of those records. Unlike libraries, their contents are unique, and constitute the material vestiges of the histories of particular institutions. It is worth noting here that not all institutional records are designated for archival preservation. The significance of the contents of archives rests not only on their uniqueness or on the fact of their selection. It is also communicated through the organisation of data into taxonomies, lexicons, and other classificatory systems. In accordance with Said's reasoning in *Orientalism*, it should be understood that those modes of organisation represent an exercise of power over data that parallels the exercise of territorial and social control – thus, what may present itself as objective intellectual labour is always already a form of domination carried out within the domain of knowledge. Hence, for example, at the end of the Spanish-American War, the United States military sent photographers, social scientists and surveyors into the Philippines, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico and Cuba to generate racial taxonomies of local populations.<sup>149</sup> Many colonial archives were originally commissioned by European colonial offices, or in the United States, by such entities as the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In the postcolonial era those archives have

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<sup>148</sup> Fusco, "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," pp. 45– 46. (work submitted)

<sup>149</sup> Wheeler, Joseph and Jose De Olivares, *Our Islands and Their People (As Seen with a Camera and Pencil)*, Ed. William S. Bryan, (St. Louis, N.D. Thompson Pub. Co., 1899).

been transferred to natural history museums, such as the National Anthropological Archive at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C.

My understanding of the term “archive” expands upon my views of race as a language and is informed by the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Allan Sekula. The term implies that the contents of the archive comprise what an institution seeks to recall about itself, which, Jacques Derrida reminds us, simultaneously entails the repression of what should be forgotten.<sup>150</sup> In his published lecture *Archive Fever*, Derrida expands upon Freud’s ideas through his association of the mental operations of memory with the technologies of inscription.<sup>151</sup> Derrida sees the archive as an externalisation of the work of memory, arguing that Freud’s theory of memory is actually a theory of the archive.<sup>152</sup> The force of repression in the case of the archive is associated with institutional control of historical memory. Archives of photographic images are particularly potent due to the apparently indexical status of the photograph, which redoubles the authoritative status of the archive as official truth, helping to mask the work of inscription and the process of selection.

Foucault defines the archive as a practice “that causes a multiplicity of statements to emerge as so many regular events” and then as “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements.”<sup>153</sup> He sees the archive’s gravitas as an effect of its pretence to objectivity, its purported truth-value. His approach to analysis of the human sciences as discursive practices is to unravel the conditions of their archival formations. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he calls for archaeological examination of these sciences’ organisational categories, “an attempt to reveal discursive practices in their complexity and density: to show that to speak is to do something – something other than to express what one thinks.”<sup>154</sup> In order to grasp, using Foucault’s model, how racial types are constructed by colonial archives, one would have to examine how those types are formulated and identified and what historical and political factors played important roles in their establishment, arriving finally at an understanding of how race is made to appear to be a fact of nature. My curatorial strategy for the *Only Skin Deep* exhibition, which stressed how race is constructed as a binary system through the use of standardised

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<sup>150</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 64.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>153</sup> Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, p. 130.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

compositions and visual tropes, was an attempt to explore Foucault's notion of archaeology.

In his landmark study of photography and the archive, artist and critic Allan Sekula openly acknowledges the Foucauldian cast of his project.<sup>155</sup> He describes the operations of photographic portraiture that emerged in the nineteenth century as a twofold system that honours some subjects while repressing others.<sup>156</sup> The honorific function was inherited from painting, but photography facilitated mass access to this form of representation, affording imaginary social mobility to the burgeoning urban middle-classes. The repressive function of photography derives from medical and anatomical illustration and established a generalised panoptic mode of looking, thereby organising the field of the other and designating its objects as instances of deviance and pathology. Sekula shows how this panoptic utilitarian function of photography was tied to the development of social sciences aimed at controlling populations. Most significantly, photography was used to give credence through "objective" illustration to physiognomy and phrenology, two intertwined pseudo-sciences that linked behavioural traits and mental faculties with physical characteristics of the face and skull respectively.<sup>157</sup> Both physiognomy and phrenology were key to the elaboration of scientific racism in the nineteenth century. Anthropological studies of non-European peoples that emerged during the same period relied on the same compositional conventions that reinforced the apparent truth-value of these pseudo-sciences.

Sekula thus explains how it is possible to conceive of a generalized shadow archive that "encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals in that terrain."<sup>158</sup> The relationship of the shadow archive to actual archives is similar to the Saussurian concepts of *langue* and *parole*: *langue* is the abstract system of language that pertains to a speech community, while *parole* is the act of putting language into practice. The colonial shadow archive would be the sum total racial types generated within a culture. Specific colonial archives contain taxonomic registries of groups in distinct colonial territories. The curatorial strategy that I used for the *Only Skin Deep* exhibition expressed my attempt to address both kinds of archives described by Sekula. I evoked the shadow archive through the organisation of materials into a binary system of visual rhetorics, which I suggested conveys ideas about race in relation to one's inferior or

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<sup>155</sup> Sekula, Allan, "The Body and the Archive," p. 346.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 347.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

superior status, one's general or particular representativeness, one's potential for social and racial mutability or one's relation to technology and progress. I also made a conscious effort to draw on state collections and to exhibit taxonomic studies of populations in protectorates and territories in order to highlight how photography was put into the service of America's territorial expansion.

While much of Sekula's essay concentrates on the techniques developed his argument stresses that these are instances of archiving that rely on the abstract concept of the archive *per se* as their conceptual underpinning. He identifies two archival logics that were developed to classify social undesirables: the nominalist approach of Alfonse Bertillon, who sought to create an encyclopaedic index of criminal facial features; and the essentialist approach of Francis Galton, who used compositing methods in order to distil the look of the criminal type by means of synthesis. It bears noting that ethnographic photography defined racial types through a combination of these two approaches. Nineteenth- and early twentieth- century taxonomies of populations in colonised territories catalogued the variety of types. On the other hand, standardised poses aided attempts at essentialist generalisations and captions often expressed the idea that photographic subjects were "ideal types."

Sekula also notes, however, that the archive as a principle, together with its marshalling of imaging technology, marks the introduction of "panoptic principles into everyday life."<sup>159</sup> He links this panoptic principle to the emergent role of the "public look" in relation to the presentation of the self and the other. As part of this institutionalisation and popularisation of the "public look," photography solidified identification with the colonial gaze through mass consumption of images of ethnic types.<sup>160</sup> While Sekula concentrates on photographs of criminals in nineteenth- century Europe and America, he states at various points in his essay that the archival principle he outlines in relation to delinquents also applies to the treatment of other socially undesirable groups. As art critic Lauri Firstenberg points out, Sekula ends his essay with an analysis of photographic works about South African apartheid. Firstenberg writes that

Sekula's inquiry pays particular attention to the ways in which the operations of the archive served to create typologies that became devices of regulatory control. With the apparatus of the camera, categories from criminology to ethnography to bourgeois subjectivity were established that facilitated the

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>160</sup> Fusco, "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," p. 42 (work submitted).

cataloguing and surveying of bodies, in visual and discursive terms, in ways that fuelled ideological investments in colonialism and nation building.<sup>161</sup>

The notion of the colonial archive in the works submitted stems in large part from Sekula's thesis. I see it as a subset of the photographic "shadow archive," in the sense of a repertoire of images that in their totality make intelligible the articulations of racial and ethnic difference that identify the colonised subject as "other." Although the ostensible purpose of this archive may have been to generate an effect of truth regarding racial meaning, the theorists who have influenced me and the artists whose works I have been drawn to read it as a trove of symbolic representations that evoke a political and cultural history of racial ideology. Not only can racial discourses that are presented as objective in fact be understood as subjective expressions of colonial ideology, but obviously fictional representations also proffer evidence of racialised vision in particular historical contexts. The colonial archive includes images that serve scientific and legal purposes as documentary evidence as well as fictional representations that rely on racial stereotypes for their substantive meaning.

It is important to note here that I conceive of the colonial archive not only as an ideal taxonomy and a repertoire of actual images but also as an array of ritualized *mise-en-scènes* of racial subjection. The notion of *mise-en-scène* surfaces repeatedly in psychoanalytic writings on fantasy to stress fantasy's staged and provisional nature. However, *mise-en-scène* is at its root a theatrical term that ties fantasy and the image to performance. This notion of *mise-en-scène* connects my theoretical interests in racial fantasy with my artistic experiments in visual media and performance. Anthropological theories of liminality, social drama and deep play, which unite social rituals and theatrical modes of presentation function as important connective tissue between the social practices that dramatize identification processes and the ritualized viewing of photographs, films, theatre and other live acts.

The term *liminality* first appears in anthropology in 1908 in the work of Arnold van Gennep, as the second stage of three rites of passage defined as separation, transition and incorporation.<sup>162</sup> The liminal stage involves separating participants from their social group during a period in which they are in an indeterminate state as they undergo a change

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<sup>161</sup> Firstenberg, Lauri. "Representing the Body Archivally in South African Photography," *Art Journal*, 62: 1, (Spring 2002), p. 58.

<sup>162</sup> Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*, Trans. Monika B. Vizzedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1961).

in social status. Anthropologist Victor Turner expanded upon van Gennep's theory of liminality, stressing its liberatory potential as a betwixt and between state. The participants' sense of identity in a liminal rite, according to Turner, is dissolved and reformulated, and in the process a sense of disorientation can occur that is akin to being unable to differentiate between dream and reality. For Turner, people or societies in liminal phases are a "kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, or societal change."<sup>163</sup> Turner is also known for his concept of *social drama*, which he developed in the 1950s to explain the symbolism of conflict and crisis resolution in the rituals of the Ndembu in central Africa. These two important concepts in Turner's thought were taken up by Richard Schechner, who worked with Turner in the 1970s to establish the field of performance studies as an intersection of anthropology and theatre studies, arguing that theatre should be understood as ritual and vice versa.<sup>164</sup>

Richard Schechner used Turner's concept of social drama to characterise performance as a site of negotiation between cultural conventions, roles and orders, suggests ways of tampering with and intervening in established belief systems and their effects on perceptions of identity.<sup>165</sup> He also highlighted the importance of anthropologist Clifford Geertz's notion of *deep play*. Geertz had coined the term to explain the relevance of performances that involve audience in encounters that make them question fundamental ideas and conventions within their cultures.<sup>166</sup> This notion of deep play shaped my approach to performance as a means of uncovering the psychodynamics of interracial and intercultural exchange. It has also informed my choice of performative scenarios: ethnographic displays, shopping malls, tourist bars and passport control stations are a few key examples of sites I recreate in order to explore the processes of colonial and postcolonial identity formation.

The concepts of liminality, social drama and deep play connect the *mise-en-scène* elements of performance with photography, ritual convention, and all of them with

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<sup>163</sup> Turner, Victor, *From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play*, (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), p. 45.

<sup>164</sup> Schechner, Richard, "Points of Contact between Anthropological and Theatrical Thought," *Between Theater and Anthropology*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), pp. 3–34. See also Victor Turner's *The Anthropology of Performance*, (New York, PAJ Publications, 1986).

<sup>165</sup> Turner, Victor. "Social Dramas in Brazilian Umbanda: The Dialectics of Meaning," *The Anthropology of Performance*, (New York, PAJ Publications, 1987), pp. 33–71.

<sup>166</sup> Geertz, Clifford. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York, Basic Books, 1973), <http://www-personal.si.umich.edu/~rfrost/courses/MatCult/content/Geertz.pdf>, accessed 8 August, 2005.

fantasy. Performative scenarios present us with social dramas that remove us from the flow of everyday experience in order to reinforce our understanding of cultural conventions and roles. In other words, they depend on our internalisation of identities as elements of an archival repertoire. The practice of viewing images, films and live performances also entails that we disconnect psychologically from our physical surroundings in order to project ourselves into a representational scene. The psychodynamics of identification and fantasy enable us to watch ourselves, or stand-ins for ourselves, as if we were performing within those scenes. The liminal quality of performative scenarios opens up the possibility of transformation through the experience of a dreamlike state in which, as in fantasy, the line between the real and the imaginary is unclear. Our ability to evaluate critically the parameters of the conventions that are made manifest depends on a suspension of the operations of “real life,” likening the work of performance to that of fantasy. However, unlike psychoanalytic interpretations of fantasy that see it as a self-contained desire, Turner, Geertz and Schechner see these performative rituals functionally as restorative measures for a given culture.

I would characterise my own experiments in performance as attempts at working through notions of social drama and deep play. I call upon my audiences to reflect on their own assumptions about and (mis)perceptions of race as either aberrations or vestiges of the historical past, rather than social conventions that persist in many guises. At a more personal level, performance art has allowed me to work with my own body and its cultural resonance in a postcolonial metropolis. Through performance, I could make use of the confusion that the mixed racial and ethnic signifiers emanating from my own body can generate in a milieu where notions of racial purity and of clearly visible and demarcated racial difference persist.

Performative scenarios offered me a context in which to elaborate an artistic and critical practice that *plays with and against race* and also provided me with theoretical models that enabled me to understand my artwork as research. Performance art, with its emphasis on live interaction, the body as instrument and medium and the cultural perceptions and reception of embodied exchange, has been an ideal arena for exploring the colonial archive and racial vision *as social practices*. In many of my performances, I reenact archetypal colonialist scenes to suggest how they underlie present-day “post-colonial” social realities. With these satirical performances, I seek to outline the ways that cultural metaphors and tropes surface in lived interactions where subjectivities are actualised, not just in fixed cultural texts.

Several of the artists whose works I have written about have elaborated similar means of critiquing representations via modes of reenactment that stage subjection to and disidentification with social conventions. For example, the narratives of Black Audio Film Collective's *Handsworth Songs* and Sankofa's *The Passion of Remembrance* are organised around acts of revision that are presented as encounters with photographic and filmic archives.<sup>167</sup> In Black Audio's documentary, the viewer is called upon to reconsider the purported objectivity of mainstream media riot footage from the racial disturbances of the 1980s. The footage is contextualised through juxtaposition with archival footage documenting black immigration to and settlement in Britain. The protagonists of Sankofa's film watch and reflect on media representations of blacks in Britain as well as the repressive character of cultural nationalist definitions of blackness that affect their identification with family and heritage. Similarly, black American artists Glenn Ligon and Carrie Mae Weems highlight critical responses by black subjects to conventions of racial representations by reframing iconic images of blacks. Ligon reproduces images from Robert Mapplethorpe's *Black Book* with captions by the black models in them, and Weems reproduces Louis Agassiz's daguerreotypes of slaves newly accompanied by texts that evoke the sentiments of an imagined black viewer.<sup>168</sup>

These artists' ways of working with archives differ in style, orientation and substance from the artworks that art historian Hal Foster describes as expressive of an "archival impulse."<sup>169</sup> However, they share important historical preconditions of archival art that Foster identifies: the political and technological expansion of source materials achieved by early twentieth-century avant-gardes; the introduction of appropriated images and serial formats; informational formats and institutional critique.<sup>170</sup> In his discussion of artists associated with relational aesthetic practices of the 1990s, Foster focuses on their use of archiving as a sculptural method, noting the artists' tactile engagement with archival materials and their replication of archival scenarios. He also claims that this new brand of archival impulse is unconcerned with a critique of representational totality, enamoured instead with archival practices as open-ended and creative forms.

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<sup>167</sup> My discussion of these films appears in "A Black Avant-Garde: Notes on Black Audio Film Collective and Sankofa," (work submitted).

<sup>168</sup> My comments on postcolonial American artists addressed to the photographic archive appear in "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," (work submitted).

<sup>169</sup> Foster, Hal. "An Archival Impulse," *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art*, Ed. Charles Merewether, (London and Cambridge, Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006), pp. 143-148.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.



On the other hand, the engagement with archives that characterises my own work and that of the postcolonial artists I have written about emphasises dynamics of seeing, reading and viewing as cognitive processes through which subjects internalise conventions, and work through or against them. This is a self-consciously critical practice, which, to use Foster's own term, "point[s] to a general crisis in ...social law – or to an important change in its workings whereby the symbolic order no longer operates through apparent totalities."<sup>171</sup> Foster characterises the will to connect fragments as a form of paranoia and champions his artists as free from a melancholic view of history as traumatic, which he associates with a previous cultural moment. This perspective casts concern for actual histories of oppression as a pathological misinterpretation of the past. I would argue that postcolonial artists consciously address actual historical traumas as the formative experiences of racialisation.

The existence of the archive in and of itself supports the premise that race is objectifiable as a visual *system* that makes bodies into signifiers of identities. In keeping with this line of thinking, in my essay "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," when I define the role of photographic images in the making of race, I posit that "rather than recording the existence of race, photography produced race as a visualisable fact."<sup>172</sup> The archive as abstract taxonomy and repository of the "evidence" of race facilitates the material practice of racism through the channelling of racial *signification* into racial *hierarchies*. The colonial archive provides the structure and data for the formulation of racial and cultural stereotypes. Social dramas about race reenact racialisation as a ritual of subjection to the stereotype. Through the archive and these rituals, we are the offered ways of seeing bodies as racialised entities. As Bhabha has argued, these constitute some of the most significant ways that colonised bodies are disciplined. As a manifestation of regulatory sciences that emerge, according to Foucault, during the modern period, the colonial archive gives rational form to the desire to use racialised vision in order to impose control over physically varied populations. The archive comes into existence in the modern age as a discursive "regime of truth" and as a series of manifestations in the form of actual physical archives throughout the world.

The power of the archive does not only lie in its function as an agent of repression, linking the symbolic representations of race with the instrumental reason of scientific racism. The archive also operates as an agent of pleasure by fetishising cultural otherness

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>172</sup> Fusco, "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," (work submitted).

and presenting it as a series of scenes, which is to say as a form of spectacle, of visual entertainment. Containing difference within a recognisable lexicon and insisting on its spectacular visibility, the colonial archive orchestrates the pleasurable experience of consumption of the cultural other as visible object, as *mise-en-scène*, as image.

## • ART-MAKING AND THE LANGUAGE OF RACE

In this section of the context statement, I will concentrate on how the works I am submitting relate to theories of race as a discursive process and to the concept of the colonial archive. To create artworks with an understanding of race as a language entails dealing with race as a form of representation, a structure composed of signifiers and a psycho-social process. To address the colonial archive as an artist and curator involves critical investigation of a repertoire of images of non-European racial and cultural identities emerging from European and American imperial projects of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finally, to interpret artworks in relation to their treatment of racial representation requires concentration on how artists use images, texts and other materials to problematise the notion of indexical representations of identity.

To make the symbolic and arbitrary nature of racial representation paramount in my creative and interpretive work is not to deny its political effects. Although racial imagery is neither fixed nor based in truth, it wields the force of what Emile Durkheim characterised as “social facts.” Durkheim coined this term to refer to a “category of facts which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him.”<sup>173</sup> The term social fact is particularly useful for explaining the ways in which race remains meaningful in the present, despite the waning of belief in scientific racism and biological determinism in the postwar period, and the elimination of overtly racist legislation. Using Durkheim’s approach, racial identity becomes explicable as a matter not of choice or destiny but of social formation. One’s willingness to subscribe to such categories would not determine identification, nor would one’s alienation from these socially produced and enforced categories imply transcendence of one’s subjected condition. Durkheim’s notion of social facts enables me to articulate the ways that race functions as a form of social, political, psychological and semiotic subjection.

The impact and function of the colonial archive on artists in the postcolonial present operate in two ways. On the one hand, we are in continuous negotiation with a representational system of racial codes and conventions through which our racial identities

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<sup>173</sup> Durkheim, Emile. *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, Ed. Steven Lukes; Trans. W.D. Halls, (New York, Free Press, 1982), pp. 50–59, <http://www2.pfeiffer.edu/~lridener/DSS/Durkheim/SOCFACT.HTML>, accessed August, 2005.

are formed. In that sense, the colonial archive can be understood as a subset of the photographic “shadow archive” theorised by Allan Sekula. On the other hand, my artist-colleagues and I undertake aesthetic practices that involve fixating upon, interacting with and reworking colonial imagery and texts as if this activity in itself were a dialogue with history. We consciously engage with the colonial archive as a series of manifestations in contemporary visual culture: historical artefacts; the master-texts of postmodern parodies; the spectral presence behind images produced for tourism and ethnic marketing; and the source material for scores of modernist treatments of “the primitive.” My caged Amerindian performance with Guillermo Gómez-Peña, for example, was an attempt to engage in a dialogue with history by resurrecting stereotypical representations of “primitive peoples” in parodic form.<sup>174</sup> As I wrote in my essay about the performance and audience reactions to it:

While the experiences of many of those who were exhibited is the stuff of legend, it is the accounts by observers and impresarios that constitute the historical and literary record of this practice in the West. My collaborator, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and I were intrigued by this legacy of performing the identity of an Other for a white audience, sensing its implications for us as performance artists dealing with cultural identity in the present. Had things changed, we wondered? How would we know, if not by unleashing those ghosts from a history that could be said to be ours?<sup>175</sup>

Cultural theorist Fredric Jameson assesses the ongoing play with images as the form of addiction that affects postmodern subjects.<sup>176</sup> For Jameson, the postmodern social field reconfigures time spatially, so that the desire for a sense of time is expressed through the impulse to create and collect photographs.<sup>177</sup> For such gestures to rise above a postmodern “collapse” of time into space, Jameson argues, they would have to function as something more than a nostalgic retrieval or simulation of history. These gestures would have to be critical attempts at a “cognitive mapping” of the present. Such mapping would visualise “the coordination of existential data (the empirical position of the subject) with

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<sup>174</sup> For documentation of the performance, consult Fusco and Paula Heredia's *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinali Odyssey*, video, (1993), 31 minutes, (work submitted).

<sup>175</sup> Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” p. 37. (work submitted)

<sup>176</sup> Jameson, Fredric. “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 1 – 54.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

the unlived, abstract conceptions of the geographic totality”<sup>178</sup> and thus “endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system.”<sup>179</sup>

Insofar as race operates as a form of subjection that imparts meaning to visible bodily signs in order to determine a subject’s access to legal rights, property and social and geographic mobility, it can indeed be interpreted as a way of locating subjects in national and transnational systems and histories. I would argue that the artists I have worked with and reflected upon in the performances, essays and curatorial project submitted have attempted to create works that *locate* postcolonial subjects in a contemporary global system by reviewing the formation of colonialism as a transnational historical phenomenon and the underpinning of today’s global order. This is also done through the exploration of the diasporic cultural connections that inform postcolonial consciousness. Within those explorations, images serve as texts that represent both historical occurrences and the problematics of colonialist vision. The postcolonial recovery focuses on what was seen in the images and who saw them, as well as what was not seen or framed. Homi Bhabha defines the particularity of the postcolonial engagement with history quite precisely in the following passage:

The power of the postcolonial translation of modernity rests in its *permutative, deformative* structure that does not simply revalue the context of a cultural tradition, or transpose values ‘cross-culturally’. The cultural inheritance of slavery of colonialism is brought *before* modernity, *not* to resolve its historic differences into a new totality, nor to forego its traditions. It is to introduce another locus of inscription and intervention, another hybrid, ‘inappropriate’ enunciative site, through that temporal split – or time-lag – that I have opened up (...) for the signification of postcolonial agency.<sup>180</sup>

The *Only Skin Deep* exhibition constitutes my most extensive investigation of the repertoire of racial imagery in the terms theorised not only by Bhabha, but also by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. I tried to demonstrate in the exhibition that race functions as a machine that continuously reconfigures and reproduces viewing pleasure.<sup>181</sup> The best example of how I have attempted to create an artwork that engages with Bhabha’s theories is the *Two Undiscovered Amerindians* performance that is documented in the video *The*

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>180</sup> Bhabha, Homi, “Race, Time and the Revision of Modernity,” *Theories of Race and Racism*, Ed. Les Back and John Solomos, (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 359.

<sup>181</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, (New York, Viking Press, 1977). Chapter 5, “The Machines,” which outlines the authors’ theory of the working of desiring machines, is particularly pertinent to the matter of race.

*Couple in the Cage*. As I note in “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” the ethnographic displays of non-Europeans in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe and America were designed to reinforce racial stereotypes through dramatic public encounters in which emergent urban white middle classes were brought into contact with “living proof” of the “primitive nature” of the peoples that their nations had colonised.<sup>182</sup> Though these exhibitions were promoted to the public using the promise of authenticity and popular derivations of scientific rhetoric, there was no real way to guarantee that any ethnographic truths were being communicated. On the contrary, because market incentives prevailed over science, when Zulus entered the American popular cultural imaginary after the Zulu War of 1879, many African-Americans were hired to play them in sideshows, since it was cheaper and easier to work with locals.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, because exaggerated racist stereotypes that functioned as evidence of the intrinsic oddness of others attracted audiences, microcephalic Central Americans toured America from 1853-1901 as the last survivors of Aztec civilization and eventually joined Barnum and Bailey’s Circus.<sup>184</sup>

The *Two Undiscovered Amerindians* performance (with Guillermo Gómez-Peña) was a parodic pastiche based on those ethnographic displays. We saw them as ritualized enactments of racial subjection in which difference is equated with physical traits *and* a primitive social state. The style of presentation was that of the *tableaux vivant*, the cage functioning as a framing device for a frieze-like view. Through these presentational means, the ethnographic display functioned similarly to photographs, arresting and framing the racialised subject in a timeless place outside history.

We studied historical accounts and reviewed illustrations and photographs of many ethnographic displays in order to create a composite complete with taxonomic charts and uniformed barkers, and we studiously avoided any attempt at claiming that we were representing any existent ethnic identity. Instead, we masqueraded as members of a tribe from a non-existent island in the Gulf of Mexico that we claimed had never been discovered by the West. The *Two Undiscovered Amerindians* performance was intended to be a reflection on the possible connections between what Bhabha calls the peculiar tendency of colonial power to express itself through fetishistic spectacles<sup>185</sup> and the postmodern impetus to visualise difference in accordance with multicultural policies and

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<sup>182</sup> Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” pp. 37–64. (work submitted)

<sup>183</sup> Bogdan, Robert. *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 176.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127–134.

<sup>185</sup> Bhabha, Homi. “The Other Question,” *The Location of Culture*, (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 83.

ethnic niche marketing. It was also supposed to be a study of how ethnographic truth is constructed in different museum contexts: we situated the performance in public plazas, art museums and natural history museums in order to demonstrate how those different contexts encouraged greater or less expectation of authenticity.

Not surprisingly, locating our performance in natural history museums generated the highest degree of controversy, since the didactic function of such institutions is widely considered paramount and their historic role in supporting colonialist views of non-Western peoples is undeniable. For example, following the performance at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., an angered member of the public called the Humane Society to complain, but was informed that the organisation only handled mistreatment of animals, not of human beings.<sup>186</sup> The Field Museum in Chicago received so many complaints that they set up a voice-mail system just to handle them. Several other performers had caged themselves in galleries before us, and artist Bonnie Sherk had conducted her public lunch performances in a cage at the San Francisco Zoo in 1971.<sup>187</sup> However, unlike other artists who had performed in cages in zoos and private galleries, Gómez-Peña and I had to contend with pervasive institutional anxiety about a performance that implicated many different cultural spaces and audiences in a long history of racist spectacle. The impression that audience members believed the simulacrum overwhelmed the work's initial reception. Instead of being perceived as an exploration of cultural misperceptions, the work was characterised by some critics and particularly by museum officials as an exercise in deception.<sup>188</sup>

The anxiety engendered by the performance and the seeming credulity of audiences, particularly those who saw us in natural history museums, often took the form of moralistic demands from bureaucrats, critics and other audience members that we as minority artists tell "the truth about race" rather than propagating fictions that might encourage more racist behaviour.<sup>189</sup> In other words, our attempts to bring to light the constructed nature of "the primitive" and to demonstrate how institutional settings help to

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<sup>186</sup> Sommers, Pamela. "Taking Art Too Seriously," *The Washington Post*, October 20, 1992, p. 22.

<sup>187</sup> This performance is documented online at <http://www.alivinglibrary.org/book1/p6.html>, accessed 12 August 2006.

<sup>188</sup> Gillis, Michael. "Museum Goes Native to Make a Point," *The Chicago Sun-Times*, January 18, 1993, p. 7; Sommers, Pamela. "The Couple in the Cage," *The Washington Post*, October 20, 1992, p. 22; and Barbekliuk, Anne. "Gibbering - for art's sake," *The Telegraph Mirror*, December 17, 1992, p. 14.

<sup>189</sup> For an astute analysis of the "burden of representation" placed on black artists during this period, see Kobena Mercer's "Black Art and the Burden of Representation," in *Welcome to the Jungle New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 233-258.

create the illusion that racial difference is both visible and true were treated as moral effrontery and a rejection of our responsibility to function as native informants. To counter this demand for authenticity and moral rectitude, I specifically sought in the video documentary to create a “reverse ethnography” that mapped out a range of audience responses to the performances, from radical sceptics to enraged believers to thoughtful passers-by who stayed long enough to study the performance and the public’s behaviour, and then draw perceptive conclusions. I also juxtaposed documentary photographs of actual ethnographic displays with outrageous parodies of “tribal primitives” from lowbrow movies from the 1960s. The aim in mixing real and fictional materials was to demonstrate that fantasy pervades our sense of authentic cultural alterity. In the years since then, the documentation of the performance in video and written form has served as the basis of numerous discussions in academic contexts about the ways that performative enactments of ethnic and racial stereotyping can function as acts of deconstruction that challenge cultural conventions and audience perceptions.<sup>190</sup>

Long after I completed this project, I came across an interpretation of reactions to historical reenactments that has prompted me to rethink my original assessment of audience responses to the caged Amerindian performance. In Marita Sturken’s study of the Vietnam War, the AIDS epidemic and technologies of cultural memory, she describes a reenactment of the Kennedy assassination undertaken by the art collectives Art Farm and T.R. Uthco in 1976.<sup>191</sup> Inspired by the infamous Zapruder film footage of Kennedy’s shooting in 1963 that was not aired on television until 1975, the artists staged a parodic replaying of the traumatic event in Dealey Plaza in Dallas, recording a videotape that they would call “The Eternal Frame.” As Sturken points out, “The event they were re-enacting, however, was not the assassination so much as the taking of the Zapruder film itself. Just as the image had been rerun again and again, the artists drove through the plaza again and again.” Much to the artists’ surprise, the tourists visiting Dealey Plaza who witnessed the performance “wept, reminisced, and took photographs, apparently under the impression that this was an officially sanctioned event. For them, the re-enactment was a conduit to

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<sup>190</sup> For a critical appraisal of the project, see Diana Taylor’s “A Savage Performance: Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco’s ‘Couple in the Cage,’” in *The Drama Review*, 42:2, (Summer, 1998), pp. 160–175. See also Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s response, “The Ethnographic Burlesque” in *The Drama Review*, 42: 2 T588, (Summer, 1998), <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/tourist/couple.html>, accessed 20 August 2006.

<sup>191</sup> Sturken, Marita. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic and the Politics of Remembering*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), pp. 29–31.



participation, a cathartic reliving of where they had been.”<sup>192</sup> However, as Sturken explains, the actual footage had not been made public immediately after the assassination, but was suppressed until 1975. All the vast majority of the public had seen prior to that moment were a few enlarged frames that were published in *Life Magazine* just after the assassination. Nonetheless, the prevalence of media representations of national traumas and the role that media images play in postwar American society as an objectification of memory have contributed to a social phenomenon in which people misremember catastrophic national events by imagining themselves as watching them on television.<sup>193</sup>

Sturken’s perspicacious analysis highlights the instability of cultural memory’s relationship with actual historical events. On the one hand, national traumas define citizenship through shared knowledge of painful occurrences regardless of whether we actually saw them; on the other hand, our identification as members of a given society is bound up with *fantasies* of having partaken of those occurrences as witnesses. The form of that “primal scene” of national belonging in the age of the televisual is a scene of witnessing. But Sturken also brings to light how simulations of history trigger emotional reactions that may seem like responses to reality, but are actually responses to *an idea of what reality was*. Thus, witnessing the reenactment substitutes for the imagined voyeuristic fantasy. The reenactment’s status as simulation offers a form of safety through distantiation.

Sturken does not presume that the tourists had to believe that what they saw was real in order to respond as if it was. Upon reading her assessment, I realized that in my own account of the caged Amerindian performance, I had assumed that those in my audiences whose apparent credulity took the form of outrage or sadness had in fact believed that Gómez-Peña and I were real savages. Although I read ironic reactions as reflexive, I did not give sufficient consideration to the possibility that what seemed like spontaneous or “authentic” emotion could also be a knowing response to a “dominant fiction.” Although the history of the ethnographic display took place before the age of television, archetypal scenes of colonialism are chapters of history that are, like the Kennedy assassination, national traumas for a society that sees itself as democratic. We know they existed, we know they were rooted in violence, and we all know what they looked like, but most Americans who are now alive did not actually see them.

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

In my essay on race and photography, I draw on Susan Sontag's argument in "Fascinating Fascism" to suggest that photographs of theatricalised scenes of racial subjection in the present may function similarly to the way that recycled fascist paraphernalia works in sadomasochistic subcultures.<sup>194</sup> Sontag interprets the fascination with the material cultural of fascism in the 1970s as both an expression of longing for emotionally powerful collective experiences in a secular democratic age *and* an attraction to politically taboo props for sadomasochistic role-play based on opposing types.<sup>195</sup> The significant difference for Sontag is that for the participants in sadomasochistic subcultures, their surrender to power is consensual and temporary, unlike real prisoners, hostages or slaves.

In this way, Sontag is able to draw a distinction between the motives of those who engage with fantasy scenarios using fascist trappings and those who, like filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, aestheticise fascism to promote its politics. I argue in my essay for the *Only Skin Deep* catalogue that this differentiation is equally important for an understanding of the attraction to and use of racial imagery.<sup>196</sup> By this I mean that attraction to racial imagery and its deployment in the domain of fantasy is not in and of itself an indication of a desire to commit racist acts in the real world. At the same time, like Sontag, I argue that imagery derived from actual historical instances of extreme exploitation and subjection does maintain an attenuated connection with the social when the imagery's manifestation is part of larger trends that express collective longing and cultural anxieties. However, if I were to put forward my own assertions about the need to address the specificity of racial fantasy as fantasy and racial representations as representations, I would have to revise my earlier writings on audience response and reconsider the nature and meaning of emotional reactions to the reenactment of racial trauma when one is both witness and participant. In doing so, I would take up Gilroy's notion of the state of the present as one of postcolonial melancholia, in which a needed process of mourning the traumatic legacy of racism is repressed.<sup>197</sup>

Over the past two decades, I have chosen to focus most of my writing on postcolonial artists whose works address the politics of racial representation by revisiting

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<sup>194</sup> Fusco, "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," p. 44, (work submitted).

<sup>195</sup> Sontag, Susan. "Fascinating Fascism," *Under the Sign of Saturn*, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1981), pp. 73–105.

<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/33d/33dTexts/SontagFascinFascism75.html>, accessed 20 August 2006.

<sup>196</sup> Fusco, "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," p. 44, (work submitted).

<sup>197</sup> Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholia*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2005).

and revising the tactics and traditions of high and popular culture. Their works often address the repertoire of imagery that comes from the colonial archive, but unlike artists of earlier periods who sought to rectify a history of misrepresentation by replacing it with more authentic renderings of minoritarian subjectivity, these artists problematise the project of creating indexical representations of race altogether. Many of them do so by foregrounding how racial imagery functions as a language, as a rhetorical system. My essay on the work of Lorna Simpson, for example, characterises her focus on the dorsal side (heads and torsos) of black women in her early photo/text works as a meditation on the doubly negated status of black femininity in Euro-American culture.<sup>198</sup>

Although she usually centres her image on the black female body, Simpson also at times abstracts the notion of the body's representativity by bringing certain highly charged elements and objects into her visual configurations. Significantly, these additions are highly coded symbols of racial identity, or more specifically, of one's identification with "blackness." Several of Simpson's pieces focus on hairstyles, denaturalizing the connection between hair and body by separating braid from head. The curly-haired braid, conjuring Afro-centric hairdos and mythical associations of hair and femininity, is here also associated with a range of social forces, linguistic constructs, and power relations.<sup>199</sup>

My commentary on Chris Ofili's pastiches of visual styles and subject matter from black popular culture of the 1970s emphasises the painter's self-conscious distancing and deracination of his source material. I also note that

[what] distinguishes these earlier gestures from Ofili's recycling is distance and deracination – black popular culture from the 1980s here becomes recombinant data, choice bits and pieces of recycled memorabilia.<sup>200</sup>

I make these comments as part of my attempt to point out that white critics' refusal to locate these techniques within a history of black artists' investigations of modernism constitutes a failure to take account of black artists' self-conscious meditations on European and American modernisms as colonial discourses with recognisable rhetorical

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<sup>198</sup> Fusco, Coco. "Uncanny Dissonance: The Work of Lorna Simpson," *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*, (New York, The New Press, 1995), pp. 97–102. (work submitted)

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

patterns.<sup>201</sup> In this sense, Ofili's revisiting of the figure of the black servant in Manet's *Olympia* parallels the efforts by such as Isaac Julien, Lyle Ashton Harris, and Glenn Ligon to respond to Robert Mapplethorpe's iconic representations of black men, which I discuss in "The Bodies that Were Not Ours." I read Ofili's black female figures via Jean Michel Basquiat, Romare Bearden, Melvin Van Peebles and Barclay Hendricks, much in the same way that I interpret contemporary black gay artists' dialogue with George Platt Lynes, Carl Van Vechten and Mapplethorpe.

Alluding to Henry Louis Gates's theory of *signifyin'* in my study of David Hammons's visual punning techniques, I posit that a close reading of the interplay of form, style, context, referencing and subject is a more effective mode of interpretation than exclusive attention to content in relation to black expressivity.<sup>202</sup> In *The Signifyin' Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Gates defines *signifyin'* as a quintessential form of black creativity.<sup>203</sup> He outlines a rhetorical practice - rooted historically in the Yoruba trickster figure, Eshu-Elegba - in which blacks create new meanings for words through the introduction of homonymic variants that alter the relationship between a given term and its usual meaning. I explain that Hammons's visualisation of *signifyin'* involves citation of culturally and politically charged iconography, which is then parodied to deflate pretension and conservatism. His punning, combined with frequent use of abject materials, underscores the race and class divisions between working-class blacks who understand the jokes and identify with the artefacts, upper-class blacks who eschew them and white elites who claim to perceive his recycled junk as art. Thus the perceptual relationships set up by the works enact the contradictory situation of black art and its status vis-à-vis high art *and* black cultural expression.

Dealing with race in its relation to language can also involve undermining the assumption that neutral subject positions are the basis for proper aesthetic reception. In my study of Chicano artist Daniel Martinez's use of provocative words, sayings, and proverbs in his public artworks that comment on urban "revitalisation," I stress how this conceptualist representational tactic effectively evokes the physical removal of racially

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<sup>201</sup> Fusco, Coco. "Captain Shit and Other Allegories of Black Stardom: the Work of Chris Ofili," *The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings*, (London, Routledge and InIVA, 2001) pp. 43-48, (work submitted).

<sup>202</sup> Fusco, Coco. "Wreaking Havoc on the Signified: The Art of David Hammons," (work submitted).

<sup>203</sup> Gates, Henry Louis. *The Signifying Monkey A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989).

undesirable populations.<sup>204</sup> For example, his street banners from 1991 that were created for Seattle's *In Public* series were emblazoned with blunt questions about home, property, buying power and social status, such as "Do you have a housekeeper?" and "Are you too poor to see a doctor?"

By thrusting his works into urban spaces that are undergoing ever-accelerating processes of privatization and social and racial segregation, Martinez demonstrates how imbalances of power in contemporary society make it virtually impossible for most sectors of the population to make their mark in the public sphere. The image of the city that comes into relief through his actions is not one of neutral spaces in which equal beings freely circulate but one of heavily surveyed territories divided along the lines of race and class, in which the interests of commerce propel the policing and expulsion of populations deemed undesirable.<sup>205</sup>

Expanding upon my understanding of the colonial archive and the work of stereotyping, I have created several videos that delve into the ways that commonly held notions of cultural and racial identity are introjected by people through the consumption of cinema, photojournalism, television, cartoons, and ethnographic and vernacular photography. *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert* revisits the history of black imaging in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, a critical historical juncture. It was a moment when images of blacks in the mainstream media began to diversify and proliferate, moving away from pure caricature and stereotyping, and also when black radicalism in the United States was demonized as a threat to national security. I wanted to consider how photography was used to create public sentiment that was made party to this process. Although official accounts of this history often give the impression that the federal government embraced the Civil Rights movement, it is well known that in the 1960s and 1970s, the FBI conducted psychological warfare campaigns against the New Left, and framed and assassinated many members of ethnic political organisations such as the Black Panther Party.<sup>206</sup> Among those targeted was Angela Davis, the black philosophy professor who was first fired from UCLA for being a member of the Communist Party in 1969 and then accused of conspiring to murder a judge as part of a plan to free the Soledad Brothers, a trio of 1960s

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<sup>204</sup> Fusco, Coco. "My Kind of Conversation: the Artwork of Daniel J. Martinez," *The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings*, (London, Routledge and InIVA, 2001), pp. 49-60. (work submitted)

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>206</sup> For a detailed account of the FBI's surveillance of Black Americans during the Civil Rights Movement, see Kenneth O'Reilly's *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972*.

prison activists.<sup>207</sup> Unlike many of her peers, she was acquitted on all charges and continues to work as a scholar and activist to this day.

*a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert* explores the ways that photography and electronic surveillance were used in her case for the production of evidence about her character, her actions and her motives. The piece is about how racial stereotyping was implicated in the making of her public image. To many in the present, Davis is a 1970s icon associated with the Afro, which is the result of decades of recycling of a handful of photographs from the international campaign for her release. Nevertheless, the range and volume of images that were produced of Davis by law enforcement and national media from the time of her hire at UCLA to the moment of her acquittal some four years later is indeed remarkable. I think it is safe to say that she was among the most photographed black women in America in the early 1970s. My impression of the media coverage is that Davis was treated as an updated version of an ethnographic oddity: the bookish black girl who sprouted an Afro and sold her soul to the Communist devil.

While researching the story of the FBI's pursuit of Davis and reading the many accounts of her trial by onlookers and participants, I began to take note of the struggle for control of public opinion and how the images and accounts of witnesses were crucial to this conflict. The relationship between Davis's case and the photographic apparatus was highly unusual in many ways. To begin with, her routine professional activities as a teacher and public speaker were fastidiously documented, edited and then presented to the public as evidence of her deviance.<sup>208</sup> Excerpts from her personal letters to George Jackson, the prisoner she had allegedly conspired to free, were read during the trial and printed in *The City of San Francisco Magazine*, published by Francis Ford Coppola.<sup>209</sup> Television news reports on her trial underscored the politically suspect nature of her international support by characterizing foreign journalists as Communist tools. The kidnapping and murder in which she was accused of participating in were also photographed, and those images were widely circulated to engage public sympathy for her

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<sup>207</sup> The most comprehensive account of this period of Davis' life is in her own autobiography, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, (New York, Bantam Books, 1976).

<sup>208</sup> Davis' first day as a lecturer at UCLA was reported on national television news in 1969. FBI agent reports from 1969 and 1970 on Angela Davis's public lectures detail her criticisms of United States involvement in Vietnam and her support for the Soledad Brothers and prison reform. One such report appears in my video, *a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert*. (work submitted).

<sup>209</sup> "The Prison Love Letters of Angela Davis to George Jackson," *City of San Francisco Magazine*, October 14, 1975, 9:14, pp. 10-15.

supposed victims.<sup>210</sup> Her physical absence from the actual crime scene generated a need to build an argument for her culpability, which depended on more manipulative use of her image by FBI agents in order to implant memories in witnesses, a tactic that was unmasked by the defence during the trial.<sup>211</sup> At the same time, in an effective counter-effort, Davis's defence committees around the world circulated images of her posed as a devout militant on the verge of martyrdom.<sup>212</sup> The media enlisted the public as spectators of a full-blown political melodrama and the FBI sought out the public as accessory of law enforcement. Davis's defence lawyers and solidarity committees called upon the public to judge the American legal system's capacity to conduct a fair trial for a person who, though an avowed enemy of the state, was nonetheless a victim of state-orchestrated injustice.

With these factors in mind, I made the artistic decision to ponder the aspects of the story where the fictional dimensions were most evidently at play, since they are most indicative of how racial fantasies affect racial identification. Significantly, during Davis's two months as a fugitive, when there was a nationwide search for her featuring an infamous FBI poster and a barrage of photographs in the press, police and federal agents received tips from "concerned citizens" identifying scores of *other* black women with afros around the country as Angela Davis.<sup>213</sup> Many of those tips led to investigations and even arrests. It is even more unusual that the FBI agents who finally arrested Davis in New York admitted in court that they could not recognise her when they found her, despite the fact that they possessed scores of photographs of her.<sup>214</sup> My analysis of these events led me to the conclusion that the effort to use photography and surveillance devices as indexing technologies that could guarantee recognition of the subject was subverted by the hypercirculation of images and the atmosphere of hysteria produced by racial and political

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<sup>210</sup> Photographs of Jonathan Jackson's attempted kidnapping on August 7, 1970, of San Quentin inmates from the Marin County Courthouse were taken by Jim Kean of the Marin Independent Journal and reprinted in newspapers around the United States.

<sup>211</sup> Davis's defense lawyers relied on psychology professor Robert H. Buckhout to testify on the unreliability of eyewitness identification, particularly the negative effects of social conditioning on racial perception. Defence attorney Leo Branton also questioned prosecution witness Alden Fleming on how an investigator from the California Attorney General's office had used photographs in a purposely misleading manner to encourage him to frame Angela Davis. See Bettina Aptheker's *The Morning Breaks: The Trial of Angela Davis*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press), p. 227 and pp. 254–255.

<sup>212</sup> Davis, Angela Y. "Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia," *Picturing Us: African-American Identity in Photography*, Ed. Deborah Willis, (New York, The New Press, 1994), pp. 171–180.

<sup>213</sup> FBI Special Agent Lawrence J. Monroe testified at Davis's trial that the FBI had received numerous telephone calls from people all over the country who claimed to have seen Angela Davis, and that he personally had received calls from people who had seen "look-alikes" as Davis. See Aptheker's *The Morning Breaks: The Trial of Angela Davis*, p. 233.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

stereotyping. I see this as relating to what Judith Butler describes as the way that attempts to restrict representation, to rein in the imaginary, “end up reproducing the phantasmatic in inadvertent ways.”<sup>215</sup>

*a/k/a Mrs. George Gilbert* is an extended reflection on the racial fantasies and desires that contributed to this frenzy of misrecognition. The story is conveyed through a conversation between a young woman who is drawn to the images of Davis as a gateway to a forgotten past and a retired FBI agent who claims to have spied on Davis and remains obsessed with her photographs some thirty years later. To evoke the blurring of fiction and reality that was central to the creation of all the myths about Davis, I wove together actual documents, newsreel footage, fictional surveillance footage of “the other Angelas” and clips from various fiction films of the 1960s and 1970s. In its relatively short life-span, the piece has generated a certain degree of confusion about how to draw the line between truth and fiction. Many curators have classified it as a documentary, even though I characterise it as an experimental collage. In discussions I have had with well-intentioned audiences, I have been asked why I did not fulfil my “responsibility” to provide truth more clearly by interviewing Davis. These responses are symptoms of the persistence of the expectations of reception from earlier eras with regard to racial imagery. Many remain fixated on the antiquated project of eliminating racism by securing perfect indexicality, while an increasingly conservative arts milieu that has revitalized formalism treats signs of race as matters of style without content, context or history.

My curatorial project, *Only Skin Deep*, gave me the opportunity to address the persistent desire for “truthful” representations of race as well as the contemporary cultural drive to deny race’s relevance by insinuating that racial beauty has no political dimension. I did so through a large-scale attempt to map out the rhetorical structures of racialised vision. As I explained in my introductory essay for the exhibition catalogue, I self-consciously avoided conventional organisational categories such as chronology, genre, and ethnic groups, opting instead for five thematic categories that cast racial representation as a binary system. In doing so, I sought to emphasise that representational strategies can cut across history and traverse photographic forms, styles and subject matter. In avoiding the multiculturalist tendency to focus on ethnic self-representation by including work by white photographers and eschewing ethnic groupings, I implied that such a gesture would only reinforce the notion that authentic expressions of race are ascertainable.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Butler, “The Force of Fantasy,” p. 108.

<sup>216</sup> Fusco, “Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors,” pp. 24–26, (work submitted).



The five thematic categories situate racial stereotypes within the colonial archive's lexicon. I posit that the logic of racial imagery corresponds to a system of visual rhetorics that function in binary terms: *Looking Up/Looking Down* showed how photographic subjects were elevated or denigrated; *Assimilate/Impersonate* dealt with how race could be envisioned as fixed or mutable; *All for One/One for All* explored how subjects are presented as individuals or representatives of types; *Humanize/Fetishize* contrasted attempts to stress subjects' individuality with treatments of the human figure as a thing; and *Progress/Regress* focused on treatment of subjects as protagonists of the future or throwbacks from the past. All the categories highlighted how race is communicated through a host of stylistic and compositional strategies.

This approach perplexed many viewers and critics, but I saw that as a necessary risk if I was to challenge deeply ingrained habits of seeing and thinking about race. The preponderance of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century images also surprised many of those who associate an interest in race with the multicultural 1980s, but I included a substantial amount of historical material to emphasise that racial imagery had been as a national obsession from the beginning of photography, not an aberration or a byproduct of postmodernist emphasis on difference. I also sought to make the historical material challenge the idea that in the present, we are more sophisticated readers of media than our nineteenth-century predecessors. Contemporary assumptions either that we have become more ironic consumers of racial imagery or that the excesses of multiculturalism have made us increase our consumption of racial imagery look quite dubious when one takes into account the sheer volume and the range in emotional tone of photographic works in America's colonial archive.

The *Only Skin Deep* exhibition is for me the best example of my research. It forced me to revise my thinking on issues on which I have been working for nearly two decades. I was fortunate enough to have the resources and time I needed to do more primary research than I have ever been able to conduct for a cultural project. The scope of the exhibition also demanded that I look at the problematics of racial representation over the course of 150 years of history, affording me a sense of perspective. One of the most important realisations to which I came in that process was that it had been very shortsighted of me to dismiss all uses of realism and documentary in photography about race as naïve attempts to support a positive-image thesis. In the 1980s, when I was engaged in debates about race and representation as part of a generational struggle in which young postmodernists were pit against older cultural nationalists, I was far too

quick to denigrate several decades of image production as intellectually bankrupt without making distinctions among artists or taking historical context into account. At the time, it seemed most important to debunk the deeply entrenched nationalist mandates that my peers and I believed were preventing us from engaging in more radical forms of aesthetic experimentation.

Through the research for the exhibition, however, I became much more aware of how self-consciously many artists had deployed realism as a form of representation in visual cultural environments that were dominated by overtly racist iconography. What may have become a hackneyed method by the 1970s had actually begun with the emergence of socially concerned photojournalism in the mid-twentieth century, which yielded an abundance of images of the poor, victims of war and other suffering populations. As much as I understood Allan Sekula's lucid critique of this form of "bourgeois humanism" in photography, I began to have a greater appreciation for the intentions of these artists and for the extraordinary evocative power of many of the works. I began to see this approach to racial representation as a counter-hegemonic humanist strategy.

In my essay for the *Only Skin Deep* catalogue I outline my revised position:

Postmodern critique of documentary realism has focused on the fallacy of the logic that asserts that positive images can refute negative ones. The premise of this critique is that photographs are representations, not unmediated documents of pre-existing realities. And therefore positive images are no truer than negative ones – no picture can "tell it like it is." While I do not dispute that assertion, I would suggest that it has at times led to the problematic assumption that documentary realism is inherently non-reflexive. This hypothesis does not give sufficient consideration to how the subjects of a photograph, not just its maker, may self-consciously construct 'the real.' This is not so much a matter of whether, in the early days of photography, nonwhite people reinvented themselves in commissioned studio portraits, just as white people did. I am more concerned here with pointing out that counter-hegemonic humanism entailed a self-conscious politics of realism.<sup>217</sup>

Perhaps I have also altered my once resolutely anti-realist stance because I am currently deeply troubled by what I see in the present: an overabundance of images of race and violence that circulate for informational and entertainment purposes, which signify

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<sup>217</sup> Fusco, "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors," p.40 (work submitted).

little or nothing at all, and a terrifying dearth of images that represent the impact of violence and warfare in ways that actually affect the consciousness of the American public as those earlier photographs did. I am convinced that the contemporary political confusion in my cultural environment is connected to the structured absence of visuals that engender empathy. At the same time, I want to be hopeful that there will be an artistic vision that finds a way out of this tragic impasse.

## • CONCLUSION

The tasks entailed by the Ph.D. by Published Works have provided me with an important opportunity to reflect upon my involvement with postcolonial theory and artistic practice and to consider the relevance of my engagements in public debates about multiculturalism, race and representation. These reflections have not only heightened my awareness of how shifting contexts affected my intellectual and aesthetic choices; they have also sharpened my understanding of the limitations of my own perspective in the heat of each moment. Hindsight has made me more aware of the need to develop a more detailed analysis of the work of fantasy in relation to race. It has also given me a greater sense of the importance of elaborating different critical paradigms for interpreting the present condition of racial hypervisibility in both popular and high culture.

In retrospect, I remain convinced that the projects submitted were effective in challenging established modes of thought about and modes of presentation of cultural otherness in artistic contexts. The efforts of postcolonial artists and cultural activists have been absorbed by numerous academic institutions in the United States and Britain, providing material for expanding fields of study. My essay “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” about my performance as a caged Amerindian, for example, has been republished in four anthologies about visual culture, performance and feminism, and is regularly assigned to students in introductory courses in anthropology, ethnic studies and performance theory.<sup>218</sup>

As a result, I continue to dialogue with scholars and students about the issues that the performance raised and about the cultural politics of the period in which it emerged.

At the same time, I believe that some of my choices as an artist in matters of presentation diminished possibilities of my engagement with audiences. My insistence on questioning the validity of representation and my suspicion of realist aesthetics, for example, have often frustrated audiences that have a sincere desire to know about the actual history of racism or the social realities of racialised groups.<sup>219</sup> Regarding the

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<sup>218</sup> See Mirzoeff, Nicholas. Ed. *The Visual Cultural Studies Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1998); Goodman, Lizbeth and Jane de Gay, Ed., *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*, (London, Routledge, 2000); Jones, Amelia. Ed., *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, (London, Routledge, 2003); forthcoming in Spanish in *Antología de lecturas en estudios de performance*, Ed. Diana Taylor and Marcela A. Fuentes, (Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007).

<sup>219</sup> For example, in his review of the *Only Skin Deep* exhibition, critic Holland Cotter laments what he perceives as a lack of historical information about the photographs on

theorizing of my own work, I now realise that a more complex and nuanced reading of my audiences' interpretations of the historical reenactment of archetypal racialised scenarios would have led to a more fruitful discussion of the psychic investment in racial fantasy. My analysis of the caged Amerindian performance, for example, would have benefited from consideration of Judith Butler's explication of the ways that fantasy undermines regimes of realism.<sup>220</sup> It could be said that in claiming that my audiences believed that my fictional primitive was real, I, too, was unable to distinguish between a conflation of signifier and referent and a pleasurable engagement with the staging of racial fantasy *as fantasy*.

Finally, I recognise that the sense of collective purpose and of political urgency that fuelled my practice at the onset had all but disappeared by the late 1990s due to changing circumstances. Several social, political and economic factors intervened, transforming the cultural landscape. What I once understood as a "new politics of difference" became, in the age of globalisation, the "new marketing of difference," represented by the selective institutionalisation and absorption into the mainstream art market of a small number of prominent black artists and other artists from non-Western countries working in Europe and North America.<sup>221</sup> This assimilation of racial difference as style and as spectacle offers a pragmatic solution to an historical legacy of exclusion, but it has also curtailed possibilities of critique, substituting it with a fetishised display of racial difference as beauty, success, power and prowess. Cultural critic Kobena Mercer describes this shift in cultural politics quite cogently:

[T]he outward face of globalisation installed an ideology of corporate internationalism whose cumulative effect was to *sublate* the discourse of multiculturalism. Cultural difference was acknowledged and made highly visible through the sign of a 'progressive' disposition, but radical difference was gradually detached from the political or moral claims once made in its name, such as the demand for recognition at stake in the Eighties debates on 'black representation.'<sup>222</sup>

In the current cultural moment, then, it can no longer be assumed that cultural expressions of difference emanating from minoritarian contexts entail a transformative

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view. "Cameras as Accomplices, Helping Race Divide America Against Itself," *The New York Times*, Dec. 19, 2003, p.E37.

<sup>220</sup> Butler, Judith. "The Force of Fantasy."

<sup>221</sup> British art critic Julian Stallabrass analyses the contemporary global art market's capacity to absorb *all* forms of difference, however shocking, in *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>222</sup> Mercer, "Ethnicity and Internationality: New British Art and Diaspora-Based Blackness," p. 193.

vision or any political impetus. Therefore, my earlier interpretation of the ironic deployment of stereotypes as a hallmark of *critical* postcolonial art practices is now insufficient. However, I suggest in my essay “Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors” that the tendency in the current cultural moment to separate a concern for racial representation from interest in beauty forecloses engagement with two crucial contributions that have been made by postcolonial theory and artistic practice with regard to racial representation. In the age of “corporate multiculturalism,”<sup>223</sup> the prevailing assumption that a post-racial state has been attained because of the marketability of some contemporary art by black artists ignores the complex role of racial fantasy in the cultural present and forecloses an important discussion about the persistence of the pleasure of racialised vision. This discussion would link past and present attraction to racial imagery.<sup>224</sup>

In recognizing the limitations of my earliest arguments about race and representation, I do not mean to suggest that the vision of culture that motivated my practice was misguided or that there was nothing significant that was gained from the attempts by artists and intellectuals to elaborate institutional critiques of Eurocentrism as a postcolonial venture. Cultural Studies in the United States has expanded the possibilities for considering the impact and significance of race. It has institutionalised interdisciplinary scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, and familiarised scholars in a wide range of disciplines with poststructuralist and postcolonial modes of textual analysis.<sup>225</sup> As a result, the cultural practices of ethnic minorities in the United States and of artists in former European colonies are studied more frequently and with a greater degree of seriousness. In keeping with this shift, several major museums in the United States have reevaluated their exhibitions of non-Western cultures and their treatment of ethnic minorities. These schools of thought and the cultural expressions they

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<sup>223</sup> The Chicago Cultural Studies group used the term “corporate multiculturalism” to distinguish the’ appropriation of cultural diversity for improved exploitation of niche markets from a politicised “critical multiculturalism” that rethinks humanistic canons and “makes political culture open and responsible to diverse viewpoints that liberal procedures normally screen out.” See Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s “Introduction to Critical Multiculturalism,” *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, Ed. David Theo Goldberg, (Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1994), pp. 107–113.

<sup>224</sup> Fusco, “Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors,” pp. 13–48. (work submitted).

<sup>225</sup> For a comprehensive survey of postcolonial readings of American culture as well as some astute comparative analyses of US border studies and postcolonial studies, see Singh and Schmidt, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity and Literature*. For an analysis of the perceptions of multiculturalism from within and outside American cultural studies, see the Chicago Cultural Studies Group, “Critical Multiculturalism,” *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, Ed. David Theo Goldberg, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), pp. 113–139.

inspired have generated new ways of seeing and understanding the formation of the nation-state, affecting the characterisations of British and American culture and society. Admittedly, my assessment of the effects of the cultural debates of the 1980s and 1990s runs counter to neo-liberal arguments that suggest that market forces alone would have produced multicultural diversity had there not been a preceding political demand.

While I acknowledge that the sense of political urgency and collective engagement that propelled my early work has dissipated, I see a continued need to generate cultural production that responds to the politics of racial representation in the present. As I noted earlier in this statement, the “War on Terror” has created a new pretext for the deployment of racial profiling. The Republican Party combines racial tokenism in its political appointments with nationwide efforts to roll back Civil Rights legislation. Just as I bring this context statement to a close, the United States Supreme Court is considering two school integration cases that challenge the legitimacy of considering race toward the end of eliminating segregation in public education: *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*. According to Critical Race theorist Patricia Williams, the plaintiffs argue that “racial balancing” violates equal protection guaranteed by the Constitution.<sup>226</sup> Williams also reminds us that the issue of school desegregation was the detonator for a series of legal decisions that ended Jim Crow laws in the United States. In the past fifteen years, conservatives *and* liberals have disparaged advocacy of integration, whether it refers to classroom or workplace composition or a literary canon, as the triumph of special interests, the decline of value, and the tyranny of political correctness. This rhetoric has paved the way for the rolling back of Civil Rights legislation, a body of law that paved the way for the integration of postcolonial studies into higher education, and created the conditions of possibility for my work. The perspective I have gained from the project of the Ph.D. by Published Works urges me to begin to imagine ways to create new works that expand upon earlier ideas while at the same adapting them to a shifting sociopolitical landscape.

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<sup>226</sup> Williams, Patricia J. “The Hydra of Jim Crow,” *The Nation*, 283: 6, August 28/September 4, 2006, p. 9.

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**N.B.: My own texts submitted for the Ph.D. by Published Works appear in boldface.**

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**PART 2: Published Works Submitted**

*(N.B.: Pagination of this section appears on title pages for each essay.)*